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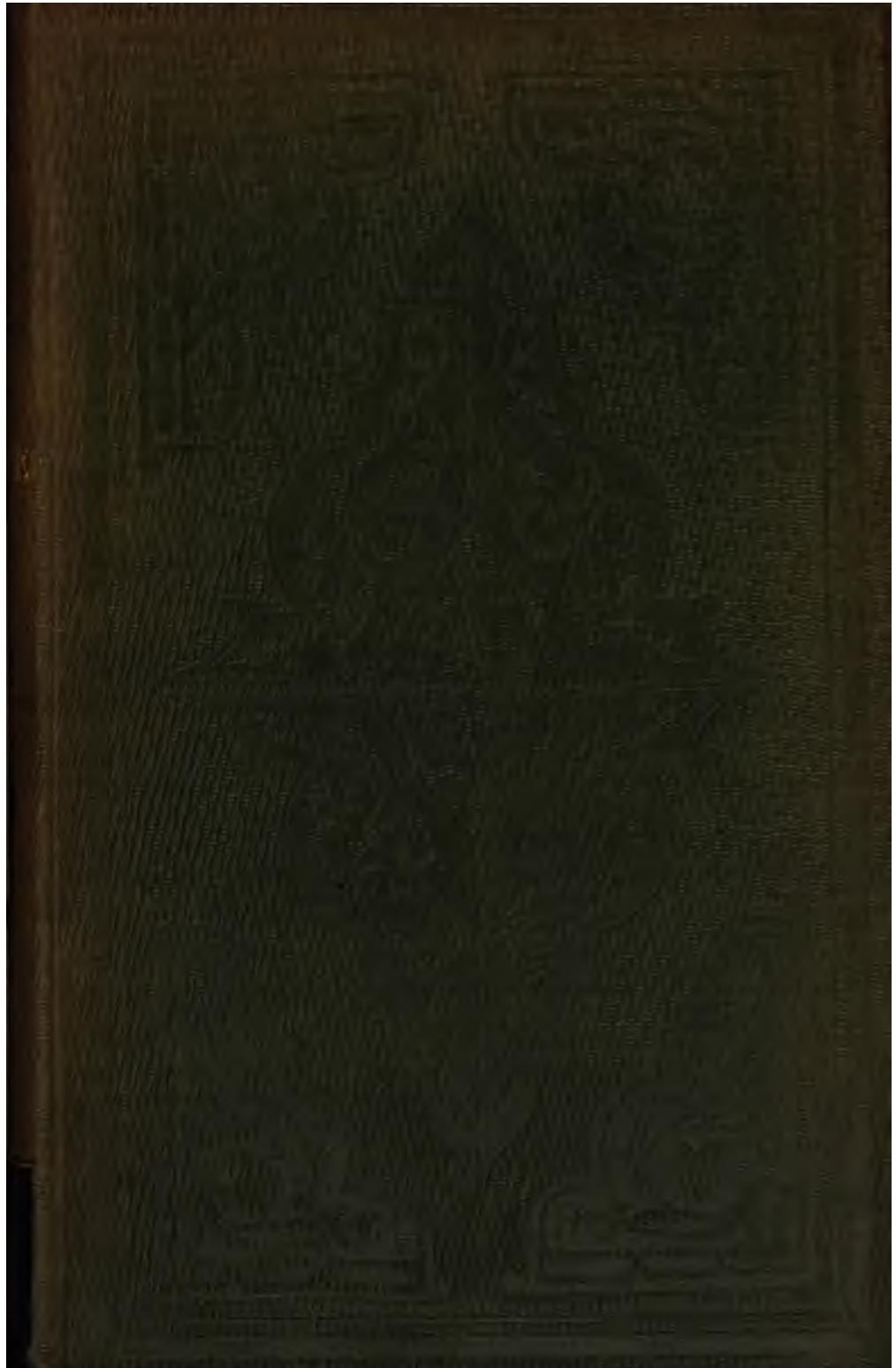
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# BETTY WESTMINSTER;

OR,

## THE WORSHIP OF WEALTH.

A NOVEL.

BY

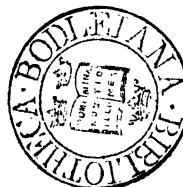
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"MOTHERS AND SONS," "TALES OF THE MOUNTAINS," &c., &c.

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# BETTY WESTMINSTER.

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## CHAPTER I.

“A GOOD HUSBAND BY ALL MEANS, MASTER WOODFORD; BUT ONE, PRYTH’EE, WILL KEEP HER COACH TO RIDE IN.”

MRS. HARLOWE, late of Glenwhyn, in Pembrokeshire, was a cousin of Lady Bellshaw.

The lease of Glenwhyn being out, she listened to the invitations of her friends, to come and live nearer to them. Glenwhyn wanted thorough repairing inside and out, which the landlord had no objection to his tenant doing at her own own pleasure and expense. “The Hermitage” wanted nothing of the sort. It was in perfect order, very tastefully fitted up, healthily and pleasantly situated, ready for immediate occupation, just about the size, &c., Mrs. Harlowe wanted; and, so, the Bellshaw’s inducements prevailed, and she took it for a term.

Gentleman is not at all a difficult word of definition, nor is lady. Mrs. Harlowe was one by every right, and in every sense of the word. But, though poor for her rank, she was very proud, holding up her head, on about £500 a-year, more than half of which went to a younger brother at her death, if he survived her, with all the consequence of as many thousands. The result was, that, with all her high blood, and titled pedigree, she was nothing near so affable and agreeable to her neighbours, or happy in herself, as if she had had somewhat less of the court in her heart, and more of the Christian.

Clearly, she had a perfect right to be proud of her maiden name and lineage; also of the unblemished rectitude of her own life; also of the dutiful love, and goodness, and rare beauty, and accomplishments of her child, her only one, her sweet Alice. And her great hope was, that that name and lineage, dating from—oh, we can't tell how far back,—and those glorious deeds of her gallant father! would ensure Alice Harlowe a husband some day worthy of her.

The question was—and it was a serious question sometimes with Mrs. Harlowe,—

"had she come to the right place, to find the right husband for her daughter, at Lowdon?"

The thought had weighed on her mind a good deal since their arrival at "The Hermitage;" but Alice appeared to like it so much, and the nearness to cousin Caroline made it so pleasant, that by degrees she settled down among them, seemingly without a wish beyond; and Caroline whispered Sir Bradley, "How delighted I am dear, to see Amy so happy and contented. It makes her look quite handsome, don't it; and ten years younger, at least, than she used to look at Glenwhyn?"

Though herself poor for her position, the Harlowe's were one of the richest families in Pembrokeshire. At the death of her husband—the estate going by entail—Amy Harlowe had to relinquish many luxuries; but her pride came to her aid and; realizing her actual strength, she wisely gave up a style, it was impossible she could support; and going into Glenwhyn, made £500 a year do, what, till then, she had no conception £500 a-year could effect. And so she lived on, till Alice was seventeen, and the lease expired; and now, a near neighbour to



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breakfast next morning, Mrs. Harlowe was very much inclined to agree, "that her taste, so far, was certainly correct."

Putting all other recommendations aside, of course an introduction at any time to the son of her husband's bosom-friend would have been very gratifying to Amy Harlowe ; but it must be admitted, that Warren was as handsome and gentlemanly a fellow as well could be, notwithstanding Harold Gawkingson's jealous sobriquets ; and, as soon as he thought that his heart might speak what it felt, as sensible, and intelligent, and agreeable a one, too, as a lover of simple truths and unselfish meanings could desire.

Mrs. Harlowe was a mother, and loved her child with a mother's love for her only one. She had, moreover, a penetrating eye, and there were no disguises or dissimulations in either Alice or in Warren. From the first moment they met, the mother's eye read all their hearts in every expression and movement ; and read she might as deeply as she pleased, for any pains either of them took to prevent it. This gratified her maternal love ; and she looked on with a

new-found sensation of placid pleasure, for which she could have given no clear reason just then; but which, had she questioned herself closely, was scarcely as disinterested as she gave it credit for.

As to loves at first sight, between hearts that had only spoken to each other with their eyes, and said nothing of parentage, purse, and position, Mrs. Harlowe knew enough of the world to estimate their value, nine out of ten of them, pretty accurately. But Alice and Warren's were not ordinary eyes and hearts; and she had already seen enough, or her judgment strangely failed her, to be satisfied—that it behaved her to put the right price, too, on their first love-looks as well as others.

To Warren's blood, on one side, there could be no objection. For the purse, Aunt Betty was, of course, the best of all guarantees—insure her only. And, that done, “what position, with right-handling, would be more enviable than Mr. Woodford's?”

Insure her only—yes, that was the point. Would Warren—there was the danger—with soul like his, go the only way to work to do this? If not, what then? “Then, he

was still a very handsome, upright, intelligent, generous, gentlemanly fellow ; but he would not be worth—unless his Aunt Barbara left him something at her death ; and that could not be much—more than his head and hands could gain him ; and that would be a very different case, and alter matters entirely.”

Aunt Betty was a cold, crafty, capricious woman, loved homage and adulation, and *would* have them from those who were to benefit a shilling by her. Self, with her, reigned supreme. And devotion to that was not always enough—a feather’s favouritism would turn her in a moment. On the mere strength of a sudden freak of fancy, thousands would go down at Archibald Sharpe’s, and thousands would be struck out. Would soul like Warren Woodford’s eyer worship golden idol like that ?

“ No never !” said Alice. “ God forbid it should !”

All the same, Warren became a constant visitor at “ The Hermitage,” and with his aunt’s knowledge, and seeming approval, too. And, though the danger still existed, it was not imminent ; so, there was always a

glad reception for him from Mrs. Harlowe ; and, as to Alice, if Warren's pride would have allowed him to have found his way through the shrubbery-wicket again, after a look from those undissembling eyes had told him in earnest he must come no more, we do not know his character as well as we thought we did.

Of course his mother and Peter got a full, true, and particular account of it all ; and of course Lucretia smiled, and shed a glad tear, and, blessing them both, grew quite pale, longing to see Alice, and judge for herself, "whether she really was the all but angel on earth that Warren painted her." And, of course, Aunt Barbara was a little huffy at first, "that she had not been consulted, before he presumed to cast approving eyes indeed on any woman on earth, that was not the image of what Barbara Woodford's miniature by Smart would tell them she was at sweet seventeen." And Peter, of course, too, had his own thoughts on the subject, and his own prayers to say, as well as others ; and, "though he should reserve any decided opinion thereon till he could see his way clearer, he was free to

confess one thing, viz., that, if a man could not have the woman he loved for his wife, he had best remain single ; and, even if he could, it was as well they should know rather more of each other, he thought, than young folks usually did in a twelvemonth's courtship ; at all events, be quite sure of this—that there was enough somehow to keep them boiling, before they laid in the pots and kettles."

Such homely truisms were incontrovertible ; though Lucretia did not judge it necessary, as yet, to do more than, in the slightest manner, touch upon them incidently in her letters. So, matters went on much as usual between them ; the post serving as the great artery of communication, to keep their hearts in full pulse towards each other—Saturday never passing without Simon getting a brimming mug of ale, over and above his rightful fee, at "The Briers," for a great sheet-full, though he would have had to leave which, now for nothing, then, O lucky reader ! Warren had to pay eightpence for—and cheap, too, considered his mother, at the money.

Meanwhile, what said Betty to it all ?

Nothing—which was a sign she thought the more.

And John Dorking got a little uneasy ; and, “ come a chance, meant to have a serious word or two with Mr. Warren about it, or, as sure as he was born, he would bitterly regret it some day.”

Warren, intent on two objects only, first, his duty towards his God ; then, his duty towards his neighbours, saw nothing of the dangers that were filling John with fear and sorrow ; and, passing all his leisure time with Alice, made sure he was most laudably engaged ; and got so handsome, as he got happier, that no wonder she persuaded him to let her take his portrait one day, in crayons, to send to his mother ; and won her heart by it to such an extent, that Peter for awhile always turned his eyes another way, and “ could see only the most ludicrous weakness in such follies.”

Meanwhile, Aunt Betty, with her eyes about her, kept her own counsel.

And Gideon kept his.

And another summer wore away :—“ and if Alice Harlowe were not to be Mrs. Warren Woodford one of these days”—why

the gossips were very much mistaken, that was all.

“What said Archibald Sharpe, attorney-at-law? Who knew so well on what foundation Mrs. Harlowe was building her hopes, as Archibald Sharpe?

Two others only—Betty Westminster herself, and Gideon Wolff.

Poor Warren! Archibald did his best to open the blindman’s eyes. What earthly hope but one filled Warren’s whole soul?

“The idiot!” cried Griggs.

“Great pity!” admitted John.

“Talk to him,” entreated Letty.

“Talk to my hat,” humped Archibald.

“He, he, he!” giggled Gideon, to himself. “Give away her pretty little chick like that to a pauper? he, he, he! Will she? Yes, trust her. Leave the sly old hen alone for that; he, he, he; not she.—A good husband by all means, Master Woodford; but one pryth’ee, will keep her a coach to ride in He, he, he! dear, pretty little chick!” and, running up to The Commodore—they had a little lesson to get by heart, “he, he, he! then he should have his supper.”

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A MILLION'S A MILLION.

WINTER gave place to spring, and "The Hermitage," with its sylvan delights, might well have charms for a heart like Warren Woodford's.

Warren's love-makings there—for that was the truth of it—were no secret to Aunt Betty. But Betty had her own motives for seeming indifferent about it; and Gideon had his, too, for giving him every chance in his power—to crush himself.

Aunt Betty had watched them narrowly, at the ball; and from that night made up her mind how she meant to act. "Nephew Woodford was free to please himself. So was she."

Though Betty by no means observed the

strict rule of her ancestors in some things, on one point she ever was, and ever would be, a true and staunch supporter of the Westminsterian canon, touching the marriages of their heirs-male. No male branch of their house had ever taken unto himself a wife without the counsel and concurrence of every member of his family ; and, " let Warren dare to think of marrying without her consent—he might do it—and so might she do, too, what she liked with her own."

Had Warren gone, in confidence, to Archibald Sharpe, and asked,—what act most suicidal can I do to disinherit myself? assuredly Archibald would have answered without hesitation,—choose a wife without Aunt Betty's consent; and he would have answered truly.

But Warren did not go to Archibald. He went only to his own heart ; and that conscientious counsellor offering no objections, he followed its dictates without a misgiving, and found them very pleasant. With his own heart only to guide him, Warren went his own way ; and Gideon, though from the first hour his hideous eyes rested on her at the ball he had sworn to

make Alice Harlowe his own ; so far from putting any obstacles in his path, did his best to clear it of every hindrance ; aye, and to strew it all he could with sweetest flowers.

Gideon Wolff had a deep and difficult game to play ; but his favourite studies had done nothing for him if he failed to rise from it the winner. A night's thought on his bed, backed by an hour or two's close-closetting next day with Lucy Gwinnet, in Cow Lane, settled all doubts ; and, redoubling his siege-operations on Betty's heart, "if Warren thought to have all the courtship and consols to himself, he was slightly mistaken." And well might Letty sigh, and John pull a long face, and Archibald knit his brows, and Christopher Griggs, clinching his fists and grinding his teeth, long to pound that infamous young limb to powder !"

"He, he, he!" giggled Gideon ; and, Betty joining in chorus—what a happy time it was for Warren ! what a satisfaction to Mrs. Harlowe, to think "how satisfied his Aunt seemed with him ;" and what joy for Alice, "to know, when the sun rose of a morning, she should be sure to have these

beautiful, bright, beaming blue eyes, beaming with all goodness as well as beauty, lovingly smiling on her, for certain, before it set again !”

Gideon had well considered his game, and, if skill and good luck could win it, he would teach them a trick, one of these days, would surprise them ! he, he, he—and, humming to himself—

“ I love Betty as my life—  
“ Alice, will you be my wife ?”

Off he went to make love to Betty, fonder than ever.

“ What’s come to the young man, I can’t think,” said Betty to herself, taking out her best cap, and looking at herself in the glass. “ Admire an old woman like me ?—Stuff and nonsense !”

But nonsense as it was, Betty preferred the black-net cap with the rose-coloured ribbons in it to any other ; for “ it decidedly became her much more”—that Gideon had ventured to tell her one day—“ became her much more than the grass-green one with the amber trimmings ;” and the look he gave her when she came down, so far from having anything like “ stuff and

nonsense" in it spoke such volumes to John Dorking, that he determined, if he lived, to have it out with Mr. Warren that very day come what might of it.

To ever stand the slightest chance of gaining over Mrs. Harlowe, which, he reckoned, was to gain the daughter, Gideon settled it in his own mind, he must be rich —richer far than Warren Woodford. How was this to be achieved? But in one way—by making himself so at all hazards as soon as possible; by getting Warren over head and ears in love with Alice Harlowe; and then, when for all the wealth in the world he would not lose her, by setting Betty on them; and then, "he, he, he! pretty dear little chick, see whether the sly old hen would give her away to a pauper?"

But, seeing it all, and in her heart disapproving of it, how was it Aunt Betty's affection for her nephew did not crush in the bud a growing passion, against which she had set her face so determinedly?

Because, first, she had no love for him; and, next, because the mischievous little god was playing havoc with her own breast, revolting as it may sound; and, in plain truth,

she wanted a pretext to quarrel, and portion him off after a fashion, and send him back to his mother.

Warren's certainly was not a happy home at Hillborough ; and that was why Letty sighed so often about him, and John Dorking had such a cloud on his brow sometimes. They regarded him, all self-hopes apart, with an interest and esteem grew daily more significant of their fears, that the slightest provocation alone was wanting to turn him precipitately from the house, and perhaps sever them for ever. . But what could they do to avert it ? Absolutely nothing more than, by such gentle hints and warnings as friendship dictated, ward off the blow as long as they could, which they saw was coming.

In fact, Aunt Betty had never felt a grain of real affection for her nephew. His handsome face and figure, and agreeable manners and conversation, had pleaded so far in his favour at first, that she was proud enough to introduce him to her friends ; but there was too much of Lucretia, his mother, in them, to excite in her own breast any other than feelings of jealousy and

anger ; and, do what he would to please, with Lucretia always before her, she was never quite at her ease with him ; and, but for Andrew and Timothy's death-bed injunctions, would have long ere this released herself of a tie that kept her in a perpetual galling fret.

Had there been but a feature or lineament of any sort of the Westminster in him, it might have been different. As it was, his merits rather injured than helped him. Would he only have fallen down and worshipped her gold, been the slave of her iron-will, done her bidding through thick and thin, ignored all the past, and learnt only how best to serve her for the future, Letty would have been saved many a sigh, on that score, and John Dorking a sad heart. Then, the rankling sore of the past might have healed over, and wrongs been set right, and atonement made, and justice been done at last, however tardily. But, like his mother, Warren would serve but One God, though he starved for it :—and, so, the sore festered on, the wrongs remained undressed, atonement there was none of, justice still cried aloud unheeded,—and

wrather and wrather grew the heart of Betty Westminster, to think, "with more than a million sterling in her hand, there was no market where she could go and buy peace."

Once John Dorking, after reading part of a letter to Warren from his mother, in which she feelingly expressed "the deep grief she was under at the present estrangement between his aunt and herself," resolved he would take the first chance he could get to drop a word or two on the subject, in a way he hoped might induce her to make it up and be friends again.

The chance offering shortly afterwards, John ventured to avail himself of it thus:—

"What a nice, kind, sensible, motherly letter Mrs. Frederick Woodford writes."

"Humph! How do you know?"

"Mr. Warren showed me part of one he got from her a day or two back."

"Better off than I am, then; never shows me any of them."

"You ought to see that."

"Why?"

"She speaks so feelingly and affectionately of"—

"Her own child. Mighty matter that—what mother don't?"

"Yes—and of somebody else, too."

"Humph! Who's that?"

"You."

"Me?"

"Yes of you. I never read anything more sisterly and affectionate."

"Time almost. What then?"

"Well, then, I shouldn't wonder—that is, I'm sure, as I'm sitting here—what she wants most at heart, is to shake hands and be good friends again."

This was an unusually long speech for John, and he turned a little pale round the nose for a moment after it.

It evidently rather surprised Betty, too. She made no answer however; but, throwing herself back in her chair, with her arms hanging down beside her, half-closed her eyes, as if willing to listen to what John might have to say further.

John took courage at this.

"What a nice thing it would be, wouldn't it, to be all good friends again?"

Betty opened one eye wide at this; then the other, and stared amazed at John's assurance.

"There now," went on John, carried away, "poor as I am, I'd give five pounds out of my pocket, hang me if I wouldn't ! to see Mrs. Woodford walk in at this moment."

Much obliged, John, I am sure. Very kind, very indeed, of you. But perhaps—and Betty drew herself up stiff—"you'll be minding your own business, John Dorking. Enough, and over, for wise folks to do, done as ought to be. Get the money together quicker than I can, spend it that way."

Thus silenced, John never ventured on the subject again.—Letty assuring him, "that it made matters worse rather than better for Warren. Betty had made a vow, that he knew, as also had her father Geoffrey and brother Timothy, when she eloped with Captain Woodford—never, if they could help it, to look on her face again ; "and nothing that Letty felt convinced of, but the hand of God would ever bring them together again."

"Well, I may be wrong," said John, getting excited ; "but if I had made a sinful vow, the best atonement, in my mind, I could offer for it, would be to break it as soon as possible, and so show that I was sorry for it."

‘That is very true and good,’ rejoined Letty; ‘and I think that is what I should do, too, John; but as neither of us have best part of a million sterling in our pockets, we can’t tell what we should do, can we?’

John rubbed his hands; and, knowingly nodding his head, had a pretty shrewd idea, seemingly, in it, ‘that a million in hand, or something under it, would make no sort of difference with him, unless, may be, to open his heart wider.’

Vow, or no vow, there was a gathering cloud hanging heavily over; and John, getting Warren alone with Letty a day or two afterwards, was resolved to out with a bit of his mind about it, before the storm came on in earnest.

Warren was speaking in eulogies of Mrs. Harlowe:—‘she was such a kind and fond mother,’ he said.

‘No objection, all the same, to a rich husband some day for Miss Alice, has she?’ asked John.

‘Beyond enough, I don’t think she covets money, for money’s sake, replied Warren.

‘Enough! What’s the meaning of that,

Mr. Warren, anywhere you know of, besides Hillborough?"

"Well, all I know is, Mrs. Harlowe's means are limited enough, John—she has told me so; and, yet, she seems very happy."

"And ought to be, as Miss Letty says, living with such an angel always?"

"Thank you, John."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Warren, I'm out in my reckoning, if Mamma means her to ride to church on a wet sunday, when she's married, in a one-horse chaise, if she can do better"

"Best go on foot, John, with a good large umbrella, in case of rain, that's more respectable; I know my wife should."

"So should mine," agreed John, looking hard at Letty; "yes, and wear pattens, too, if need be, to keep her feet dry."

"I tell you, I dont believe Mrs. Harlowe cares for wealth, for wealth's sake, more than you or I do, John," resumed Warren, returning to the point.

"May be," returned John, lowering his voice and glancing at the key-hole, as a foot-fall crossed the passage. "Shall I tell *you* something?—in the same under key.—"I'll

wager a trifle she does, though"—and again John lowered his tone still deeper:—"Drat that young villain ! I'm not John Dorking if he hasn't an eye for the girl himself—and that's fact."

Warren burst out laughing.

" You'll see then."

" Nonsense, John."

" You'll see."

" It's too ludicrous, John.

" It's too true, Mr. Warren.

" How do you mean ?"

" Miss Harlowe is a lovely girl, and highly accomplished."

" So she is, John."

" Others see it as well as you, Mr. Warren?"

" Wherefore not? The greater compliment to my taste, John.

" Probably Mrs. Harlowe will see fit to have a voice in the matter?"

" Undoubtedly. Who has a better right."

" She is said to be ambitious."

" To see her daughter married and settled some day, John, as she ought to be? No question about it"

" Your Aunt, Mr. Warren, will die worth not less than a million."

"Poor woman!" thought Warren to himself.

"Well, John, what then?"

"Then you must inherit it after her, as you ought, that's clear—if—if—if you would have Miss Harlowe."

"If not, how then, John?"

"How then? Then, sure as fate, Gideon Wolff will, that's all!" and, stang by it, John jumped up from his chair, and pacing the room backward and forward, gave Warren time to swallow it at his leisure.

"Gideon Wolff, John? Good heavens!"

"Gideon Wolff," echoed John.

"John, you are joking?"

"Never more in stern earnest in my life."

"Gideon Wolff?"

"Why not? A million's a million."

"Miss Harlowe agree to that?"

"Miss is not Mrs., is she, Mr. Warren?"

That seemed so plain and palpable, that Warren took a moment or two to quite make it out.

"Well—well, then, John?"

"Then, all I say is, look sharp out after that"—and John shook his brawny fist at the door—"or, as true as I earn my bread

by the sweat of my brow, he'll trip you up, and get her some day."

"Get Alice Harlowe? Alice Harlowe ever be Mrs. Gideon Wolff? No, no, John, never—never!" cried Warren. "Unless—and he turned pale as a sheet as he said it—"unless, senseless, they drag her to the altar, and marry him to a maniac."

"Nevertheless," advised Letty, "best, wouldn't it not, on all scores, to keep good friends with your Aunt, Mr. Warren; and so never have any dreadful tragedies of that sort, which are only proper, you know, in play-houses?"

Warren tried to smile; but Letty's words had sunk deeper than even John thought for; and merely promising "he would be on his best behaviour for the future," went up to his room to dress for the friendly little musical-party there was to be that evening at Lowdon.

Gideon was going, too. Lady Bellshaw had been herself to Betty on purpose to invite him, and "would take no refusal."

Betty was only afraid, "he was so unused to company, he might be a little shy and awkward in his manners at first."

"That I can't grant, dear," differed her Ladyship. "Look at the ball. He behaved charmingly! Unused—yes, that is it—he must go out more. There's the right sort of metal there to take a fine polish. Why not come, too, yourself, dear?"

No—Betty would not be prevailed on; but was mightily pleased at the thought of Gideon's going; and off he went, turned out by his old friend Duffy, as well as Stultz could have done it.

Somehow, Warren was ten minutes longer at his toilet that evening than usual; and found Gideon, when he entered the drawing room, complacently stirring his first cup of coffee on a settee between Mrs. and Miss Harlowe; entertaining them with such scraps of Hillborough gossip as he thought would amuse them.

It was surprising, considering the very little of anything like good society he had ever seen, that Gideon Wolff acquitted himself as well as he did. True, there was his father's blood in his veins, and blood goes a good way; and he had a sharp eye and keen perception, coupled with not a bad taste at all in dress, and a peculiarity

of look and manner all his own, which gave a sort of marked character to everything he said and did. Though hideously ugly, there was a decided cut above the common about him ; and, if it went with his interests, he could be, apparently, open and liberal-hearted enough ; though, in fact, close, and crafty, and callous as the twin-brother rogues he admired so in his darling *Æsop*. Shy he was to an extent, as Betty said ; but, come occasion, he could be saucy, too, and show his teeth, and, then, woe betide those who got a bite !

If ever there was a person to put a shy young man at his ease in a moment, it was Lady Bellshaw. It was the sign in her of something more than the high bred woman. At first, under the soft blaze of the chandeliers, Gideon felt a little *géné*, with Harold Gawkington and Dora Fawn's critical glances piercing through him. But Lady Bellshaw, with charming grace, soon put all that to flight ; so that by the time Warren made his appearance, any one, to have looked at him, talking and laughing away without the slightest embarrassment, might have supposed, Curzon Street rather

than Cow Lane was his rightful whereabouts.

Well, after shaking hands, Alice Harlowe made a little side-movement, enough to say, "there is room here, Mr. Woodford, if you would like to sit down; but, perhaps Warren did not understand, for, going over to Caroline Bellshaw—the image, only more lovely if possible, of what her mother had been at sixteen—chatted and laughed away with her as gaily as if he were thinking only of the sweet pair of blue eyes were then and there smiling on him; and knew nothing of other bright blue twain so near to him; and which strange, too, could see nothing, seemingly, just then to employ then—but Gideon Wolff.

Tea and coffee over, there was a move to the piano; and Florence Plover, taking the lead, electrified them all with a new Sonata just from Germany. Her force of finger was prodigious! She excelled in those difficult sort of pieces, with astounding variations; and broke a wire in the bass, giving the last bar.

Then Dora must sing her new song, "Oh, Would I Were A Little Bird," which, Sir

Bradley declared she gave better than Miss Stephens.

And Dora would ; " if, first, Alice Harlowe would delight them with that sweet little melody, " Kindred Links," which she sang at their house the night before ?"

Mrs. Harlowe smiled " yes ;" and Warren's eyes smiling yes, too—Gideon led her gracefully enough to the piano ; and placing the music, as if he had been Herr—what's his name, himself,—" oh, don't trouble," said Alice, " I know it by heart ;" and sweetly as voice could sing it, sang as follows :—

" Little links that gently rivet  
Kindred hearts in closer ties,  
Silken chains of fond affection  
Round our dearest sympathies,  
Go on winding,  
Closer binding,  
True joys finding,  
Never minding  
What the cold world think or say :  
Precious bonds of mutual love,  
Foretaste true of joys above,  
Hearts bound by you happy they !

In each little treasur'd token  
What soul-histories are reveal'd,  
What a world of truths are spoken,  
Else had ever lain conceal'd :—

Go on winding,  
Links thus binding,  
Such joys finding,  
Never minding  
What the cold world think or say:  
Link'd together thus in one,  
Earth made happy, heaven won,  
Hearts bound by you happy they!"

The "Little Links" unlinking their tongues, even Gideon became eloquent; and Warren stared surprised to hear the intimate knowledge he seemed to have on a subject, of all others the very last he would have thought he had a taste for.

It is astonishing, how, with the smallest amount of true knowledge, ingenuity passes current at the high price it does often, even among the wise and learned.

Enjoying a *tête-à-tête* together, even the astute and sagacious Mr. Plover listened, with Lady Bellshaw, to his shrewd remarks with keen relish; while Sir Bradley, smiling in his sleeve, moved off with Mrs. Harlowe to a lounge, where they could have a quiet little chat about Warren and Aunt Betty.

"All trump cards in his hand, too," said Sir Bradley, glancing at Warren, "if he only knew how to play them."

"Don't he?"

"No more than my girl Carie, there."

"He is so conscientious!"

"Not much of the Westminster in him."

"The image, they say, in disposition, of his mother?"

"Antipodes, the sisters."

"A nice person, isn't she, Lucretia Woodford?"

"A sweet woman!"

"What a pity!"

"Hates her like poison."

"Sad, isn't it? And nearly a million, hasn't she?"

"Will be more soon, they say."

"He is very handsome, isn't he, and gentlemanly?"

"That's the least merit that his aunt sees in him."

"Do they agree pretty well together?"

"Oil and vinegar."

"Pity—great pity! What can he be thinking of?"

"Of home; or Alice Harlowe; or, may be, it's not unlikely, of how he is to get that £600 together, he talks to Griggs of, to make him an engineer."

"An engineer?"  
Isn't it, as Griggs says, maddening?"

"Is it possible?"  
"You may well stare."  
"Silly fellow!"

"Confounded booby, I say! I've no patience with it! You may carry conscientiousness too far. There now, look at him at this moment—coming the conscientious with my Carie; that he may do as he would be done by, and behave like a gentleman to that Gideon, who's supplanting him—that's the fellow all over."

"Supplanting him?"  
"Yes, and will walk off with every shilling one of these days, if he don't look out."

Mrs. Harlowe gave a nervous twist in her seat, and was lost in thought for a moment.

"Can it be possible?"  
"What do you think he answers Archibald Sharpe, when he tells him, 'he must bend a little more with Aunt Betty, if he ever wants to be master?'"

"What?"  
"That he worships but One God, and that's not a golden one."

"But he don't tell his aunt that, surely?"

"No, not exactly. But keep anything from Gideon Wolff that he wants to know, if you can,"—and Sir Bradley dropped his voice to a whisper.—"He's a regular limb, as Christopher Griggs says, the very devil himself for mischief."

"Limb of mischief, or not," thought Mrs. Harlowe to herself, as "he, he, he!" came ringing like little golden bells in her ears, "a million's a million, that's certain. No wonder they are a bit jealous; and, Betty all but in love with, him too, herself."

And now Dora must sing her song, *Oh, Would I Were A Little Bird!*

And Dora did—and Harold swore to himself "he would make her an offer positively next day."

It threw Sir Bradley into perfect ecstacies! So much so, that when he shut his eyes, "he could have fancied he was in Covent Garden, listening to Miss Stephens; only the little straight-backed chairs they gave them to sit on there rendered it quite impossible to soar up into the spheres, as he, and, he could see, Mr. Plover had been doing for the last ten minutes."

"Mr. Plover "could speak for himself.

So to speak, he had been greatly pleased and, yet, not pleased."

Florence Plover, with a curl of the lip, "thought, then, he had better say as little as possible about it."

All Blandon meant was this—"he only wished"—and he spoke earnestly—"that young ladies, who excelled as they did, would help them a little more, than they seemed to have voice and courage for, at church on Sundays."

To this there could be but one unanimous opinion:—and Florence, having regained her supremacy by playing another sonata, twice as electric as the last!—sweetly wished good night. And Harold insisting on an *encore* before he left, of *Oh Would I Were A Little Bird*, :—song followed song—the claret cup went round ; and before midnight struck at all events, one important end was gained—Dora Gawkington was all but a *fait accompli*.

To her mother's questions, Alice hardly knew whether she had enjoyed herself or not; "certainly not half as much as on the evening she first met Warren at the ball."

Gideon had exceedingly ! and so he told

Betty next morning, “he, he, heing !” away, at breakfast.

Warren said so, too ; but, as with Alice, there was a drawback somewhere. He had taxed his heart about it many times, but could get no satisfactory reply. Quite happy he had not been. Why he could not tell. Perhaps it was the thought of what John had been saying to him that had damped him a little ; for, do what he would, he could not drive it altogether from his mind. “A million’s a million,” he kept repeating to himself.—“Oh, would that I had but six hundred !”

## CHAPTER III.

### PRESENTIMENTS.

WARREN WOODFORD was not a fanciful person ; so, it must have been true, as he imagined, that Mrs. Harlowe's manner was not quite so kind and cordial as usual when he went to "The Hermitage" next day. Alice received him in her own usual, simple, artless, happy way ; but there was a shade of coldness and constraint about her mother, which, not knowing how to account for otherwise, he attributed to over fatigue perhaps the night before, or slight indisposition, or any other cause but the right one. True, Mrs. Harlowe smiled on him as she shook his hand ; but at the same time scanned him so curiously, and had so many enquiries to make about Aunt Betty, and

Gideon Wolff, that he was glad to turn from her catechising questions to the two confiding eyes that had nothing but candour and content in them, and, in their sweet approval, was made ample amends for the sleepless night he had passed for once. "Let those eyes but smile as they were then doing, and darkness itself would turn into light effulgent, the dreariest wilderness into a paradise on earth!"

But, here again, it was not to be all as Warren would have it that day. Who was he, indeed, to be entitled to his paradise on earth, as if he came to market for it with his million, not in prospect merely, but in pocket?

Alice knew who and what he was without asking another question ; and, be what there might in pocket or prospect, had but one wish just then, viz., "that he would please to make haste, and finish that long story he was so full of, about Sir Hiron King, the great civil engineer, who was doing such marvellous wonders ! and come out into the green-house and look at her orange roses."

" So he should," when Mamma intended,

"when Mamma had quite done with him; but not before." Mamma that morning was in no hurry at all, having to finish the hemming of the lace frill in her hand first; "and then would put on her bonnet, too, and gloves, and go and do a little gardening herself, and shew Warren the new glass bee-hives, Clutterbuck had got over from Southampton, which they were talking about yesterday.

There was no help for it, and Warren's manifest delight, in return, was perhaps the first knowing untruth he had ever been guilty of in his life. It brought its own punishment; for, seeing him so patient and cheerful, Mrs. Harlowe kept him pinned to her side, chatting on as they went from flower to flower, so that it was impossible he could get away with any sort of grace; and all the consolation he had, was from the knowledge that he deserved it for his insincerity, and the certainty that Alice thought so, too.

Assuredly, Alice did think he need not have been so very interested that morning in the bee-hives, especially as he knew they must pass them in the orchard as they went down to the brook. As it was, they must

of course please Mamma ; but she should take leave to tell him, " another time to expect no good from wearing two faces."

At last Mamma's inconsiderateness became so tiresome, that, out of all patience, Miss Alice would see what a little finessing on her part would do ; and, spying Clutterbuck crossing the shrubbery, off she ran after him, to come and help her gather some water-grasses that she wanted for a drawing.

At any other time, Warren would have deemed it indispensable of him to follow her as fast as he could, and save Clutterbuck the trouble ; but Mrs. Harlowe was in the middle of a story, and what was he to do ?"

" Stay where you are , " said the story, " and hear me out, before you move an inch . "

Warren's endurance was a master-piece ! and, yet, there, he knew, was Alice at the brook, impatiently waiting for him, and encountering all manner of perils, both of flood and field, after her water-nosegay ; and no one there but that clumsy awkward Clutterbuck, to save her, if she fell in, from drowning.

Mrs. Harlowe's long garden-bonnet allowed of little more than her face being seen sideways; except when, her eyes turned up to note the effect of any question she had put to him, Warren got a full view of it; as now, looking at him, she permitted him to have, to better catch what he said in reply to an enquiry she was making about his mother's health at Roxbury; and why the thought should have struck him, he could not tell, but there was an expression in her glance—it might be the bonnet that gave it—an expression so unlike her usual self, that he stared at her a moment before replying; when, letting her eyes fall again on the geranium she was snipping at, she repeated it;—"Your mother has her health better, you think, at Roxbury than here?"

"Oh yes, much!"

"It is a long time now, is it not, since she was at Hillborough?"

"It is indeed. With her own will, she would be here to-morrow, if she could."

"I think I would, if I were she."

"Would you? And what good would that do? You don't know."

"Yes I do—that your Aunt has vowed never to see her more, if she can help it. Were I in your mother's place, I think, Warren, she should have no option."

"But to turn us both from her door to a certainty."

"Do you imagine so?"

"Yes—else my mother would long ago have done it."

"Well, she knows best. Your Aunt seems very kind to you?"

"I try my best."

"And succeed tolerably well it seems?"

"Not quite as well as I ought, they say."

Ah! how is that?"

"I suppose I don't bow and bend enough."

"There, do you know, Warren, I blame you a little. Yes, I do. No one admires conscientiousness, and a right independent spirit in a young man, more than I do; but in this world we must, one and all of us sometimes comply to day, you know, that we may command to-morrow."

A ready answer rose to Warren's lips but he suppressed it; and merely replying, "Gold may be bought too dear,"—Mrs.

Harlowe went on with her scissor-work for half a minute in silence.

"No pains, no profit, I suppose that's pretty much how it is with your Aunt?" she resumed, looking up with rather more of a smile.

"About the profit I can't say," replied Warren. "Some of them take pains enough, poor things! All I know is, they will never get me to give what they want for it there."

"How much may that be?"

"Oh, no great matter of, trouble certainly; only to bow down and worship it."

"Well some of them do rather overdo it, that's true, assented Mrs. Harlowe. But you see, Warren, wealth has its whims, which one must wink at a little, to get our way sometimes. Had we ourselves only to consider in this life, we should act very differently often to what we do. Clearly, were it not for your mother, I can easily understand a spirit like yours choosing rather to go and break stones on the road, than so to humble itself even for millions. But for her—but for your mother—I should say, as you do, take the course you best approve, and rise to fame and fortune by your own merit; and that is

what every one else would say who knows and loves you, and sees the soul you've got. But, you know my dear Warren—hark!—you know there *is* that dear mother, deservedly dear, to think for—you least of all need be told that—and—and”—suddenly gathering together the cuttings into a bunch, and then sheathing her scissors, Mrs. Harlowe dropped them into a little front pocket in her apron, as the rumbling of carriage wheels up the drive announced visitors; and enjoining, “him to run and tell Alice that Lady Bellshaw's landau-full was in the drawing room,” off went Warren like a stag let loose; so rejoiced to have his liberty, that, thinking of it only, by the time he reached the brook he must have forgotten, we suppose, all about the landau-full, for it was at least five minutes before it flashed across him.

Alice had just succeeded, after several ineffectual efforts, and at imminent risk of a good ducking, in securing a handfull of the particular grasses she wanted; and, holding them up in triumph, said, as plainly as words could:—“Thank you, Mr. Woodford, for your very kind assistance. You never thought I was one half so clever.”

"Oh, yes, I did," smiled Warren. "And gathered all those yourself?"

"All myself. And you really are come at last?"

"Yes, and by the bye, there's a memory—come to fetch you back post haste to your mother, Miss. I am in a great hurry. Will you come, or not, Miss?"

"No, Sir; I am not to be hurried in that way.

Warren stamped his foot with impatience.

"That's no sort of use, Sir. Those kind of airs won't do for me," frowned Alice, leisurely taking a seat on a rustic bench under the ivy, and searching for a ribbon in her pocket to tie up her nosegay with.

"I shall go distracted!" cried Warren.

"Help me just fasten these first, will you?"

The knot tied :—"Hark!—what was that?" asked Alice.

"Mamma coming, with the Bellshaw's, to look for us, I shouldn't wonder," replied Warren.

"The Bellshaws?"

"Yes, a landau full—didn't you hear it?"

"Oh, was that their carriage? Here's a pretty pickle I am in!"

"Wet to the skin; so you are I declare  
—all up your arm to the elbow."

"I never can be seen by them this figure  
can I? And Carie in her new blue silk, I'll  
be bound."

"They'll be here in two minutes."

"Will they? Come along then. See if  
I'll be caught this fright. Come along. I  
want to call in on Dosey Ward, if you are  
not in a great hurry. Let's go round by  
the lane; and then you can tell me, if you  
like, what makes you so solemn and serious  
this morning?"

"Solemn and serious?"

"Yes—and it don't become you at all, I  
can tell you."

"A miserable mis-fit? So it is—I can't  
endure it myself?"

"Oh! why put it on then?"

"It's not of my own choosing."

"Whose then, pray?"

"Did you ever wake of a morning—per-  
haps not—with a heavy lump at your heart  
you could not account for?"

"No. But I think I have occasionally  
with something; akin to it, which, though  
I could account for very well, if I chose, I  
could not, because I would not, get rid of."

" I mean, with a kind of presentiment of some impending evil over you ; not evil perhaps exactly, but of some trouble or other going to happen to you ?"

" Oh, ! yes, I understand. Very often. But it always took flight, after I had said my prayers ; bathed my temples well in cold water ; and then looked it straight in the face."

" And it never troubled you after that ?"

" No, not to care about."

" I suppose," sighed Warren, " the brave stare in the face *would* be best, nine times out of ten ?"

Something was on Alice's lips, but there it remained unuttered ; for, spite of her bravery, her heart told her, as well as Warren's heart told him, that there might possibly be the tenth case, in which the cold plunge, and brave stare in the face, aye, even the prayers themselves, would fail to make others as good and true as oneself ; and for a little while they walked on in mutual silence.

Make light of it as she would, the "presentiment," as Warren called it, of coming trouble, was, in truth, weighing a little on

Alice's heart that day as well as Warren's. For some days past she had fancied her mother's tone and manner towards him had not been quite as warm and welcoming as usual ; but it was not till they shook hands that afternoon, that she felt sure she was right ; and her quick and accurate perception saw through the whole truth of it in a moment :—the fact was, Mamma was not at all satisfied that Nephew Warren would inherit Aunt Betty's wealth.

This was the secret of the matter ; and Alice's heart had sunk at the thought of it no less often than had Warren's, oftener a great deal, within the last day or two, than she chose to acknowledge. Well she knew her mother's love of riches, and that it was her highest ambition to see her wedded some day, at least, to affluence ; and a shudder crept over her, as the hideous face and figure of Gideon Wolff rose up before her, and she fancied she saw him, with his baleful leers and detestable ‘ he, he, he’s,’ laying his ill-got thousands at her feet, if she would only consent to have him.

At length Dosey Ward's pretty ivy-fronted cottage peeped forth pleasantly from out of

its leafy nook by the lane side, and they found their tongues again.

"How pale you look!" said Warren, anxiously. "I hope Dosey Ward has got a good fire. You must be perishing with that soaked sleeve? I am quite sure you will catch cold."

"You should have made more haste, then, and come and helped me."

"How could I leave your mother?"

"And what did she talk so pleasantly about, to keep you so long?"

"Oh, of Roxbury; and what a pity it was we were not all good friends again; and that I ought to bow and bend to my Aunt more than I do; and—and—"

"What a conscientious simpleton you were—to—"

"Let Gideon Wolff cheat me out of my birthright, and my—"

"Alice Harlowe, after that fashion—yes, that's her name, don't you know it?"

"When," exclaimed Warren, as well as he could articulate with the joy that fluttered afresh at his heart, "when, bend but the knee a little more—only worship the idol

they serve,—and I might be the happiest of the happy—there's a booby!"

"And you will not, I suppose, if you starve for it?"

Warren sought in the tender gaze that accompanied the question its own answer.

"And now, what would I have you do, you are going to ask?" smiled Alice.

"You conjuror!"

"A million's a deal of money to lose?"

"Let alone Alice Harlowe?"

"What has she to do with it?"

"Only what you yourself were just now saying she had."

"Oh, I see—you would not easily deny your dear mother anything?"

"Nor must you—in reason."

"I never will, Warren."

"Then answer me," cried Warren, his eyes sparkling, but his cheeks without a drop of blood left in them; "answer me this one question more—granted I lose my million, and he gets it—how then?"

"What do you mean?"

"Might there be reason *then*—in—in his asking you to be—to be—"

"Mrs. Gideon Wolff?" and tears dimmed

Alice's eyes, as she spoke. "Yes, when I had taken leave of my own, perhaps there might. Please wait till then," she whispered, as now they entered Dosey's wicket ; "when it will be time enough to despair, won't it?"

Warren's heart leaped again, as they stood at Dosey's door. But the wet sleeve could not be dried, as Dosey's fire was out. Her brown-bread and honey and new-milk, however, were so delicious, that that was forgotten ; and had it not been for a kind little cuckoo bird, which, fluttering up out of its nest in the old clock in the corner, bade them remember, 'it was going to strike one, and, unless he made haste, Aunt Betty would be looking down her nose,' Warren would never have been tired of Dosey's comfortable arm-chair and cheerful chat.

As it was, "cuckoo was quite right, and it was very kind of him indeed!"—and, shaking hands, and bidding good-bye ; and then having seen Alice inside her own gate, off Warren ran at the top of his speed—so fast, that he got into his chair at the dinner-table before the first pudding-plates had gone round—but with what appetite may be supposed, after the bread and honey ;

though the anxiety poor Letty had been in at his absence, even for that short while, was what no one had any conception of but John Dorking ; for there had been a storm brewing on Betty's brow all the morning, and, "sure as fate," as Letty's downcast look betokened, "they were going to have it down on them with a vengeance by and bye."

## CHAPTER IV.

### WARREN'S PRESENTIMENT NO DREAM.

BETTY "kept it in," as John expressed it, till, the cloth drawn, it was evident, by the up and down working of her eyebrows, and the hard thumps she gave the table every time she brought her hand down on it, she was "getting up the steam" for an explosion.

Letty, seeing it coming, recollectod something that wanted doing up stairs, and was making her escape ; when :—

" Mighty hurry you're in to-day," cried Betty. " Wait, mightn't you, for ten minutes, till the dumpliug's gone down ?"

" *I* must be off, though," said John, " if we're to get *The Elizabeth* unloaded to-day ;" and off John went.

Gideon, wanted, too, at wharf-side, was sliding after him, and had got his hand on the door, when John gave it a sudden savage pull to ; and, jambing it in across the knuckles, made the “ young limb ” dance again with pain.

This set Betty off. Rising, crimson with rage, and addressing Letty, rather than Warren, although every word was levelled red-hot at him :—“ Now you all mind,” said she, shaking her fist, “ mind this—some people don’t know on which side their bread’s buttered, and must be taught,—let any one of you—I don’t care which it is—come dropping in here after meal times again—do you think I keep a public house?—dare any one of you to do it again,—and, sure as I’ve a sinner’s soul to be saved, I’ll sweep the place clean of you, and good rid-dance.”

“ I believe I am the only one to blame in this instance,” said Warren, mildly.

“ Blame or not,” screamed Betty, stung with his composure, which was what always irritated her most ; “ you, nor anybody else, are going to make my house a convenience, I tell you. Stand that will I ? And for

that proud, pompous, peacock-feathered thing up there, and her vain, lackadaisical minx of a daughter, with her rubbishing airs and graces? No, trust me! Not a pin to choose, isn't there, betwixt me and my monkey? Very well—now you mind—mind this,—hate my dog, hate me,—ever again keep company with them up there; and, sure as I hope for heaven hereafter, you shall never darken my doors more."

Warren started. The blood rushed to his face; then back to his heart; he felt his head swimming, and the room rocking and running round with him; but by a strong effort he governed himself; and, grasping the chair-back, stood looking fixedly at his aunt without uttering a word.

Instead of appeasing, this incensed her still more; and, hissing rather than talking at him:—"Lost your tongue, too, as well as your heart, have you?" she continued, emphasizing the end of every sentence with her fist on the table. "Poor love-sick! lost his tongue? Can hear fast enough, though, I'll be sworn for that. Not a pin to choose, eh—not a pin, 'twixt monkey and mistress?"

Spite of the gravity of the occasion, Warren thought of something in connexion at the moment, and could not repress a slight smile.

Bumping into her chair with all her weight :—“ That’s it, is it ? ” cried Betty, her eyes glaring, and the veins of her neck and temples swollen almost to bursting. “ Laugh at me, do you, and to my face ? — You do—you dare—you will—cut your nose off, to be revenged of your face, that way ? ”

“ I did not laugh at *you*, ” replied Warren. “ I only smiled as a thought crossed me at the moment, about”—

“ You lie—you know you do—there it is in your face, ” hissed Betty, the froth on her lip, and livid with passion.

“ I lie ? ” repeated Warren, trembling with agitation ; but, not daring to trust himself further, he stood, as it seemed, trying to swallow something in his throat which would not go down ; till, catching Letty’s eyes fixed imploringly on him, it turned the tide ; and, burying his face in his hands, he burst into tears.

“ Tut, tut—none of your crocodiles here, ” cried Betty, on whose heart tears fell about

as softening as oil upon adamant. "This isn't the mart for those wares—no use they at market—not going to turn a penny by them—have done with your whimpering here—didn't come to Hillborough, did you, for that?—mind—you'll give up that girl—do you hear?"

"Give up—give up?" repeated Warren, the spell broken, and, looking sorrowfully, but resolved, into his aunt's face;—but there he stopped, as if it suddenly struck him, that it would be profanation to so much as breathe the sweet name on his lips at such a moment.

"Yes, give her up—that's it—give her up—from this hour—and for ever?"

Another beseeching glance from Letty counselled forbearance.

"Why?" asked Warren.

"Because I say so."

"Show me that I ought, and I will do it."

"Good," said Letty's eyes.

"It's enough that I'll have it so, isn't it?"

"If with good reason, not else."

Letty turned pale as a sheet.

"Will you break it off, or won't you?"

"Yes—if you will give me a sufficient reason for so doing,"

"Not else?"

"Never—till she says I must herself."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" grimly smiled Betty, rising and snatching up her keys and basket. "Not till *she* gives you leave? Very well—now we understand each other—that's best a great deal. But mind—best get leave pretty quick—or, please to understand one thing—you'll never darken my doors more;" and, bidding Letty attend her, she walked, chuckling within herself, out of the room, without another word.

Alone, Warren sat for a minute motionless as a statue; then, feeling to awake as from a troubled dream, rose from his seat amidst a confusion of conflicting thoughts dizzied him so, his brain felt all on fire. His senses seemed at fault. Struggle as he would he could not collect himself at all. He was conscious that a heavy blow had been dealt him, under which he was reeling; but, paining him as his head did, the chief grief of all seemed to be at his heart. It was full to choking; and, gasping for breath,

he threw up the window, or, he felt he should be stifled.

The fresh draught from the street cooled his burning temples. "How light, and gay, and happy the world looked out of doors ! Oh, what hells within some made for themselves, whose homes might be little earthly elysiums, if they would ! What should he do ? Stay there ? Never ! He would go and find John Dorking, and unburthen his mind by telling him all about it. No, on second thoughts, John was then up to his ears in business ; and John, during business hours, was anything but a good listener. He knew, too, what he would say :—' give in—give her up, if needs must—come what may, you must not disoblige your aunt.' Give her up ? Yes, when her own lips, or death, said so—not before ;"—and, scarcely knowing on what precise errand he was bent, Warren found himself, after about half an hour's wandering, at Mrs. Harlowe's gates.

"Miss Harlowe was confined to her room," said Ninon, the French maid ; "with a bad cold, caught from getting wet down at the brook, they thought, that morning. She had come in with her sleeve wringing wet ;

and Mr. Griggs had been, as she felt all of a shiver, and made her go to bed ; but, if Mr. Woodford would wait a little while, Mrs. Harlowe would be down presently, and would tell him all about it."

" That I will do," said Warren, entering the boudoir. " I am in no hurry," he added ; though every moment, after the first five minutes, seemed hours dragging their weary length, which all the treasures of Alice's cabinets, and handy-work on all sides, had no charms that day to shorten ; till at last Mrs. Harlowe, looking thoughtful and anxious, made her appearance ; and explaining, " that she had been attending on Alice, who would not be able to see him, she feared, for some days,—a cold chill crept over him, and for a minute or more his lips trembled so he could not articulate a word.

Like his model, Peter Borrington, Warren, when he had anything to tell, told it briefly and came at once to the point ; and now feeling the necessity for saying what he had to say without further delay, with a strong effort recovered his usual self-command, and in a few words put Mrs. Harlowe in possession of all that had passed between

him and his aunt since he left them that morning.

Mrs. Harlowe received the communication, as might have been anticipated, like a lady, with perfect breeding and good taste, though with a calmness, that, however ladylike, appeared to have more of coldness than composure in it to poor Warren; and made him think what his mother's heart would have felt and done for him under like circumstances.

Mrs. Harlowe "perfectly well remembered her silly nonsense about the Mistress and her Monkey." It was very foolish of her, very indiscreet. Mr. Wolff must have overheard her, didn't he think so, and told his aunt?"

"Yes, no doubt."

"Ah well, he may have meant no harm. He is such an oddity—quite a curiosity! No lumping legacy for me. I've offended past forgiveness, that's certain."

"Oh no. You can make it up as soon as you like—when *I* have paid the penalty."

"You? Nonsense!"

I must do one of two things."  
How?"

Either give up The Hermitage, or give up my Aunt."

Mrs. Harlowe thought a moment, as if a new light had struck her; and then, in a more cheerful tone, "I'll tell you what, Warren," said she, "it's best, perhaps, as it is. Nay, reason before rashness always—and that's what Peter Borrington would say, too, I'm sure. There must be no quarrelling; you must go and make peace with your aunt."

"She has called me a liar."

"That don't prove you to be one, does it? Rubbish! You know her temper, and must bear with it. Cast your bread in the streets, and it will be soon picked up. Don't be foolish. Others will find it sweet, if you don't."

There was an expression in the look with which this was said, so disagreeable to Warren, that he felt to shrink from it; and, dropping his eyes to the ground, could make no answer. Reading his thoughts to the bottom:—"Well now," continued Mrs. Harlowe, appealingly, "let us put it in this way, Warren—what would your excellent old friend and tutor, Peter Borrington

himself, advise you to do about it, think you?"

"What would Peter Borrington advise me?" repeated Warren, looking up full into her face, and smiling sweetly. "First, to pray to be enlightened to a right mind and understanding; and then, for grace and strength, to act accordingly."

"And your mother?"

What Peter advised, would advise, too, to a certainty.

"What—if it disinherited you?"

"Of my million? Yes, unquestionable—rather than I should forfeit my-self-esteem."

"Yes, yes—that is all very well, and good, and proper; but you are not the only one to be considered in this matter, Warren," reminded Mrs. Harlowe, more piqued at the reply than she wished to show. There is another, you know, for whom you must think—think most seriously. Yes, and bear I know, and forbear, a great deal; for the grand point is, who is there to advocate your dear mother's cause, if you fail her? Her rights call, I needn't say, for any and every possible sacrifice you can make for them; no one feels at heart the truth of that

more than yourself. And that is why I said this morning, don't you remember? wealth has its whims, which we must wink at sometimes in this world, to get our way. You quite understood me, I am sure. Now, then, do take my advice. Let us put it in this way. Would Peter Borrington, do you think, counsel you, after all the pains and labour you have gone through, and with such a rich, and righteous reward in store, for only a little longer patience and forbearance, to kick it all down in a moment; because, in the heat of passion, your Aunt said what, on reflection, she would no doubt be sorry for and ashamed of?"

A deep sigh was all Warren's answer; for his conscience told him, there were weighing with him other insuperable difficulties besides the "self-esteem," which, in truth, Peter, could he be brought, under the circumstances, to make as light of as Mrs. Harlowe did, might not be disposed to regard as quite so insurmountable a matter as he Warren himself made of it. "What had his Aunt said?—'Give her up at once' and for ever, or never darken my doors more.' Tear his heart out of his breast.

Patience and forbearance—what, then, would they avail?" and raising, his swimming eyes to a crayon portrait of Alice over the piano, Warren sat with his whole heart exclusively absorbed by it; forgetting that he had made no answer to the personal questions had just been put to him.

Mrs. Harlowe saw the necessity of explicitness between them.

" You will go then, won't you, Warren, and make it up at once with your Aunt?"

" If I did," replied, Warren, meeting the penetrating look fixed on him with his usual candour, " this is the last time, may be, I should ever darken *these* doors again; unless—"

" The storm blown over after a bit, came— "

" Poor I—the same as heretofore—yes, welcome as ever no doubt—no fear of that," —and his lip trembled—" a most excellent and exemplary nephew—only *minus* my million sterling."

" No—a calm, as it would I'll be bound, with patience," gently differed Mrs. Harlowe, drawing a long breath. " All the same, let us be reasonable. More than ever,

so it seems to me, and so I think your mother and Peter would say, it behoves you 'to know,' as Aunt Betty expresses it, 'on, which side your bread is buttered ;' and not, whatever you do, to 'cut your nose off to be revenged of your face'—that would be grievous!"

Warren listened.

" Maintaining, therefore, as I do, Warren," continued Mrs. Harlowe—who rather liked advice-giving—" that, for your dear mother's sake, you ought to bear with your Aunt's tempers; and feeling that, in this matter, she alone should be your first consideration, and that I should never forgive myself if you ever suffered wrong or injury in any way on my account—there appears to me no doubt whatever as to the course you ought to adopt; viz., to go and shake hands and be good friends as soon as you get home. Don't you think so? If not, I can only the more deeply regret that any feelings—and I understand them fully—you may indulge for this cottage should have brought you into trouble. Especially as my duty, you see that, Warren, compels me, under the circumstances, however painful it

may be, to give place absolutely and entirely from this hour, to your Aunt ; who unquestionably, by every tie and right, has the first claim on you ; whose bread, remember, you are eating ; and whose wishes, in reason, as long as you are under her roof, you are bound, I think, to prefer to any others. I am sure your good sense must and does acknowledge all this. Though we now part, however"—and Mrs. Harlowe rose from her seat as she spoke, and held out both hands—"part, for a season only, let us hope—it is as best friends should—to meet again, let us believe, some day—when we can do so, my dear Warren, with mutual pleasure and congratulations ?"

Warren had a full and clear sense of every word that had been uttered ; though the mists that came thickening before his eyes, and the same confused singing in his ears which had made Betty's parlour seem to be turning round with him, forced him to hold again by the chair rail, to prevent himself from reeling.

A bell rang from up-stairs.

Again Mrs Harlowe extended her hands.

" You will—you will?" said Warren,

glancing towards the crayon portrait ; “ tell Miss—tell Alice—all—tell her—”

“ Yes, yes—”

The bell rang again.

“ Yes, yes— depend on it—be sure of that —All your own heart, my dear Warren, could wish to say ;” and moving towards the door. “ What duty demands of us, we must, you know, Warren, cheerfully respond to. That is our best wisdom. I will write to your mother to-morrow. She will applaud what you have done, be satisfied of that. And Peter, too—yes, yes—I understand—good bye—good bye.”

“ Good bye—good bye !” muttered Warren to himself, as he strode on, pale and heart-sick, towards the town again. “ Oh, what a desolate scene it had changed into since yesterday !” Till, coming to wharf-side, there stood John Dorking, giving some parting orders to the bargemen on *The Elizabeth* ; and, touching him on the arm, “ John, I want to speak to you,” he said in a hollow voice, “ if you can spare me ten minutes ;” and abstractedly took the path-way along the river side.

“ Mercy on us ! as your Aunt says, what’s

the matter now?" exclaimed John, stopping short. "Why, you've no more blood in your face than a turnip, Mr. Warren!"

"Have I not, John?"

"And sad and solemn, too, your voice, as if you had all the cares of the world upon you?"

"Cares enough."

"What, your Aunt been at you again?"

"Hark, John. You know, when I have made up my mind, it is not a little will make me alter it?"

"Which makes it the more fortunate, Mr. Warren, excuse me, that you have honest John always handy, to come to at a pinch?"

"I stand on my own counsel to-day, John."

"Ah, the deuce you do? Then there's danger."

"My Aunt called me a liar but now."

"Oh, did she? It's her habit. She has called me—me, honest John — the same twenty times, or as good; and how much do you think I mind it?—and John answered his own question by snapping his fingers.

"Yes, but she has never told you, has

she?" asked Warren, bitterly, " told you flat to your face, that, if you did not give up Letty Gordon, you should never darken her doors more?"

" No, not quite," answered John, with a sudden short gruff cough.

" What, if she had?"

" What, if she had? Well, then, I think, I should have given her up—for a little while—till we could have come together again some fine day, when she wouldn't have minded it."

" John, you will think me a fool I dare-say."

" Pardon, Mr. Warren—I have more respect for my own judgment."

" Right, or wrong, John, I leave Hillborough for Roxbury at seven o'clock to-morrow morning."

" Faith! and, barring these cold easterlies, a monstrous pleasant change, Mr. Warren. I only wish I was going with you."

" John, I heartily wish you were."

" And honest John's to look sharp after your rights in your absence?"

" Rights!"

" How long holiday have you got?"

"In all human probability, John, I shall not return to my Aunt's again."

John, not thinking of how near the river's edge he was, but for Warren's grasp of his arm, had certainly over-balanced himself and gone in, with the jump he gave. For now he did indeed begin to entertain shrewd suspicions as to the state of his young master's intellects, and stared at him thunderstruck, all power of remonstrance gone for the moment.

"Griggs is wrong, John—never more out—I'm as sane as you are."

"Are you sure? You would never, would you, make ducks and drakes of your fortune—if you will have it—like that, for a pretty face, can wait ten years easy, and then neither of you have done growing wiser?"

"My mind is made up, John.

"Then you will do it, and it's no good talking."

"None, on that score. And now—you will promise me, John—promise me—"

"To look sharp after that limb of mischief, eh; and see he don't carry off Miss Alice, in your absense?"

Warren grasped the offered hand of honest, hearty friendship, and wanted no further promise or assurance.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," added John, "if that will be any comfort—let him come it too strong ever there, and I'll make her an offer myself, and floor him."

Thus consoled, and after another turn or two, during which "The Hermitage" and all that it contained were again and again committed to John's never-sleeping watch and ward, with the full understanding of regular postal communications between them as often as John's unemployed evenings might give him leisure for,—Warren wrung hands for the night on that subject. And, as soon as tea was all over, having packed up his luggage, during Betty and Gideon's absence at a neighbour's up street, and Bibbs, on an errand of John's to Polly Quarles—he got it away, and stowed all safe in the coach office from which 'The Defiance' started next morning. And, John agreeing that perhaps it was as well to say nothing that night to any one, if he did not want it blown all over the town; and promising to bid good bye &c., &c., to Letty in particular, who, of

course, could not ever be blamed if she knew nothing about it ; he went to his pillow to get what sleep he might, and before Aunt Betty opened her eyes next day—having ascertained from Clutterbuck, through Ninon, some half hour before the coach picked him up, "that Miss Alice had passed a good night, and was a little better that morning"—he was hastening, as fast as four horses could take him, under the tender care of his old friend Dick Acre, to the home of all others his heart most yearned for on earth just then—his mother's arms.

## CHAPTER V.

### "GUILTY, OR NOT GUILTY?"

RATTLING on at the rate of ten miles an hour towards his home, with the conviction that he was doing what he ought, and what his mother and Peter, let alone Aunt Barbara; would entirely approve when they knew his reasons, Warren's sense of emancipation from a yoke that had become, but for one tie, almost intollerable, was delicious in the extreme.

For a stage or two he was very sad-hearted, and could see and think of nothing but Alice Harlowe in her sick-room, and that "good-bye" of her mother's which kept ringing in his ears like a death-knell.

But Dick Acre had a wonderfully

winning way of his own, and artistically insinuating himself by degrees, at last got such a hold, that the mile-posts flew by like lightning, and Warren's heart beat again in his bosom like a young heart should.

Ross reached, he consulted his purse. There was ample and over there for one of master Buckadam's yellow po'-chaises and pair all the way on to Rexbury, if he had been so minded, but he was not. So, he bargained for a stout single horse and four-wheel pheaton, as the ostler called it, and jumping in, and Bob Brimble on the box, threw himself back, resolved to bear, like a philosopher the six miles an hour across country which he saw before him.

But jog-trot patience and perseverance will come to the journey's end at last and land you safely, where more speed oftentimes ends in a broken neck. And this might have been Bob's comfort; as, at length pulling up at "The Six Bells," about a quarter of a mile from Rexbury, the sudden jolt jolted Warren out of a delicious doze into which he had fallen, and drew from Bob the exclamation:—"Well, here we is,

sir, safe and sound. You've had a nice sleep over the heath ; and I druv on gentle not to wake you."

"Thank you—yes—I feel quite alive again now," cried Warren ; and leaping out almost into Nancy Hooper's arms—the shaking of hands and congratulations, as Bob led his horse round into the yard, that now ensued in Nancy's little parlour, was of a kind highly delightful to those concerned in it, but which the reader can probably fully enter into without any further talk about it.

Nancy's, joy was such as simple souls like Nancy's revel in ; and, Bob Acre settled with handsomely, and hard at work over something that smelt very nice on a little round table all to himself in the kitchen, flanked by a quart jug of foaming home brewed,—Warren had something to say in Nancy's private ear :—"would she be so good as to keep his trunks where they were till he sent Humphrey for them ? as he wanted to surprise them at The Briers after a manner he had set his mind on. But first he purposed to go across, through Copse-

walk, to the parsonage, and find the Vicar, if he could, before he went there."

What could be easier? " You have only to slip out at the garden gate, there," reminded Nancy, " into the orchard; then go across the lane, you know, to the style; and keep the copse-side as far as the larch-clump, and there you are in five minutes."

Pursuing the path laid down with bounding heart—how could he well miss it, when he knew every inch of it?—Warren reached the Parsonage unnoticed; and, rushing in, almost threw Dinah into hysterics. John Norris, too, staggered, rubbed his eyes to make quite sure, but it was several minutes before he would believe them, when Warren bursting out laughing, the happy old sounds cleared the mists in a moment from the old man's vision better than all the spectacles; and Dinah running and drawing a mug of ale, they had a brimming glass a-piece, which more than all convinced John Norris it really was Mr. Warren, and no delusion.

But now what was to be done? The vicar was not at home—he had gone to dine at "The Briers."

Very well, then, Warren had nothing left

for it but to be off and after him, and trust to his own advocacy to insure him a loving-welcome. To avoid the village, he would make a little *detour*, cross the river by the Mill-head, over the tumbling-bay, and so steal in at the shrubbery-bottom, and not even Humphrey get wind of it.

"Why he should have taken such pains to smuggle himself into his own rightful home so secretly, puzzled Nancy Hooper exceedingly. Might she have had her will, she would have set the bells ringing such a peal, would have made all their hearts dance again; but she supposed he had his reasons, and they must be good ones, whatever they were, that was certain."

Spanning the stream about twenty paces above the lock, a couple of broad planks, bridging it across, saved a roundabout of best part of a quarter of a mile, wanted you to go the short cut over the meadows to "The Briers." Making for this, Warren had got a first foot on it, when he thought he heard a voice holloing to him to "stop;" and looking in the direction from whence it came, there was an old gentleman and his

servant, apparently, some hundred yards down the river among the willows, knee deep in the water, trying to land a fish about which they seemed much excited.

Springing forward, in less than a minute Warren was by their side ; and lending an experienced hand, presently a splendid speckle-belly, of at least five pounds weight, was floundering, a captive, on *terra firma*.

“ Got him at last !” cried the old angler, taking off his hat and wiping away the heat-drops from his forehead with his orange-silk pocket-handkerchief ; “ and a pretty dance he has led us after him for the last three days.”

Mark seemed no less proud of the capture than his master ; and having tenderly put him out of his misery, Waltonian fashion—after another good look :—“ he’s a picture !” said the old gentleman. “ Take him up to the house, Mark ; and then go and get some dry clothes on, and a drop of something warm to drink, and tell them I shall be in in half an hour.”

“ It’s all to nothing the finest fish I ever

saw taken out of these waters," said Warren, delightedly assisting to put up the old gentleman's tackle.

"Indeed! Then you reside hereabouts perhaps?" he answered.

"Yes, within half a mile—at 'The Briers.' "

"Ah! I know—Miss Barbara Woodford's pretty place yonder?"

"Yes."

"A relation?"

"A great aunt, by my father's side."

"Ah—your name then is Woodford, too?"

"Yes."

"And—and Mrs. Frederick Woodford, who lives, does she not, with your aunt? is ——"

"My mother."

"Your mother?" and suddenly stopping winding up the line on its reel, the old man fixed his keen grey eyes on the fresh, open, handsome countenance of his young companion for a moment or two; then, dropping them again on the reel, while he went on mechanically with the winding;—"I knew your father when he was a young man, not many years older than yourself," he

continued ; “ but”—and here he looked thoughtfully up again—“ but you are more like your mother than him a great deal.”

“ Do you think so ?” replied Warren, taken by the kind tone and manner with which the remark was made.

“ Yes, a great deal,” repeated the old gentleman, as if pleasurable dwelling on the thought, and, yet, for some reason, painfully, too. “ I know something of these parts, though I seldom visit them now. I wish I had done so oftener. The thoughts they induce breathe of peace. They are associated in my mind with many early joys. *They* were not all dreams, no, no. Do you love the gentle art ?”

“ Ardently !”

“ So did I once ; so I do still ; but my old arm can’t throw a fly now as it used.”

“ You have no reason to say that to-day ?” differed Warren, smilingly.

“ No, that’s true ; not a bad wind-up, is it, for an old man of seventy-two ? Did you ever see a stuffed pike of nine pounds and a half in a glass case in the little study next the library at my kinsfolk’s house yonder ?”

"At 'The Bury?'"

"Yes."

"Oh, often."

"I caught him down there in the back-waters, when I was only fifteen."

Warren's eyes sparkled.

"Yes, love it, didn't I, as my life? Here, all along the river, as far as we can see, and farther, I used to be, holiday times, flogging the water from morning till night—the fish must have got quite sick of me. That was something like happiness! I never knew any to equal it. Are you home here for a holiday, too?"

Warren looked surprised rather at the question; and was framing an answer, when with a smile:—"You see what busy-bodies country quarters make of us," said the old sportsman. "Candidly, I guessed who you were before you had opened your mouth. Yes, I know all about you. I can't help it—they will tell me, whether I want or not. And so, you're to be as rich as a Jew some day?"

"I?"

"At your Aunt's death—your Aunt

Westminster—the richest spinster, they say in all England?"

Warren heaved a sigh.

"What's there to sigh for at that?"

"Only, I would take six hundred for it all to-morrow, and thank them."

"Ah! Six hundred? Six hundred—for what?"

"To put me out to some honest calling, that's all, without beggaring my mother."

"Ah! Well, that shews pluck, if not prudence;" and, the clocks striking time to dress for dinner:—"Farewell, now, then, and thank you," said the old angler. "This hour has recalled some joys of the past—past I thought for ever—and a grief or two mixed with them. They are inseparably along with us all on earth, are they not? I know I've found the happiest moments, at all events, are ever the briefest. Will you please me in one thing further?"

Warren bowed.

Though strangers to each other, as a young to an old man, your equal in rank, I think you may. This old arm, though too stiff, I feel, to achieve any more Waltonian

triumphs, is not so powerless yet but that it can find nerve to do an act of grace, to tickle its fancy, if it come in its way. It has amends to make for many things—more than it ever will make, or ever can. But what have you to do with that? It am rambling. With this sun-down my angling days are over. I shan't tarnish to-day's laurels, believe me. You say you love the gentle art? Then, in lieu of a better, please me by carrying this old rod and reel for the future in your river-rambles. They have performed something in their time. You need not be ashamed of them. And, when these old bones are under the sod, and you look at my keepsake—think sometimes, nothing better uppermost, of the still May-evening when you made acquaintance with the bent-browed old gentleman in the snuff-brown suit among the withies here, will you?"

Never in his life had Warren felt the want of words to suitably express himself more than at this moment. There was a something in the old man's tone and manner as he spoke that puzzled as well as pleased him; and he was trying for a fit acknowledgment, when, seeing his embarrassment,

the old angler gave him no time to collect himself, but pressing his arm, and merely adding :—"I shall be obliged to put up with pot-luck if I don't make haste," took the path towards "The Bury," at his best pace across the spinnie; and the next minute was out of sight among the bushes.

Lost in conjecture, Warren stood stock-still, looking at the rod and reel in his hand, and wondering, what merit of his could possibly have entitled to him such a windfall?

"Strange! Yet, it was the sort of thing, just the sort of thing Peter himself would have done. No, he didn't know that it was strange at all. Old men of that class and character did odd things very often—freaks of fancy that became their fine old white heads amazingly! Everything was in the way a thing was done. To have refused it would have been uncourteous in the extreme. From an old to a young man, of course that made all the difference. 'He had once known his father,' he said. Yes, old memories, that was it? It was a beautiful rod! What would Peter say?"—and shouldering it without more ado, and stepping out,—less

than a quarter of an hour suffered to bring him to Aunt Barbara's shubby wicket.

Evening was closing in. Aunt Barbara, had moved from the dessert to the window, to make the most of what light yet remained to look again at some embroidery patterns of great beauty that had come that morning in a parcel with some other charming things from her niece Sophy Danvers, in India; who, on the death of her father, dear old Dr. Woodford, went out with a loving relation, and was jumped at, and made his little wife by the gallant Captain of that renowned name in the battle-field, before she had landed six weeks.

Lucretia, over-joyed to hear such excellent accounts as dear Sophy's letter's gave him of her, and her dear hubby and two little ones, was enlisting Peter's warmest sympathies in their behalf, just as, bringing a fresh glass of the yellow-seal between his eye and the light, he was thinking, "how it was the crust had got shaken so?"—when, the door was thrown suddenly open, and Warren stood before them.

Had you shot a cannon off at Peter's

elbow, unawares, you would have scarcely made him jump ; had you trodden on a worm in his path, or wantonly ensanguined a feather of the plumage of the humblest warbler of the grove, and he would have taken it as a blow aimed straight at his own heart.

Calmly putting down his untasted glass, he stared, but without the slightest visible sign of astonishment, though any one might have been seen his eyes dancing with joy at the sight of his pupil, as shading his brows with his left coat-cuff, he quietly took another good look, while Lucretia, with a burst of transport, rushed into his open arms, and Aunt Barbara jumping up, would have done so, too, if there had been room for her. Then, as soon as he saw a chance ; "Now be sober will you both?" said he ; and catching him by the hand with a true Peter Borrington grasp that brought the tears into his eyes, and, pushing him down on a chair—"how dared you, sir," he cried, "to come here in this extraordinary manner, turning the house out of window this way?"

But Lucretia must first be heard. And then ensued such a contest between her and

Aunt Barbara for precedence, that, stepping in, Peter settled it at once by taking him, all to himself, and so bringing them to reason.

And then, Aunt Barbara must request to be informed, "how it was, he, her nephew, came stealing into her premises the back way, as if he were ashamed of himself? What would people be thinking? Putting up at The Six Bells, indeed! That was all very fine—to take them by surprise. If it had been out of modesty, she should not have minded so much. There was something very doubtful about it. If he had not happened to have money enough for a post chaise, she would have lent him some, if his mother would not, for the credit of the family. Then, as to his running away, and turning his back on his bread and butter as he had done, she, his Aunt Barbara, was not his mother, thank goodness! and should take leave to reserve her opinion about it till she had weighed it well over. She should very much like to put a question or two to Miss Alice Harlowe — yes, well he might blush scarlet. No doubt Aunt Betty's temper was a little touchy and trying at times—who's was not that could afford it as she could? If she,

Aunt Barbara herself had a million, she should like to very much to have her own will sometimes. To kick down a fine fortune that way, and his mother to be feasting her eyes on him, as if he had come with it safe in his pocket, did seem to her so inconsistent! And the Vicar, too, to be sitting there and holding his tongue, as if he were dumb; and, if he did his duty, was it not as plain as the nose on her face what he ought to do? Pray, might she ask what the Rev. Mr. Peter Borrington thought of it all? Was the young man guilty, or, not guilty?"

Peter "copied good originals only, and, if Miss Barbara Woodford had no objection, would also reserve his judgment till he had slept on it"—a resolution warmly applauded by Lucretia. "And then, if Warren would breakfast with him next day, they would have it all over together *serialim*; report progress; and pass sentence in open court when they returned to luncheon."

Aunt Barbara's scruples thus in a measure appeased, all hearts were at liberty to think and, speak out as far as she deemed it discreet and proper. And, as a token of it, and that Aunty had some conscience, it was full an

hour later than his usual wont that happy night, before she would let Peter have his hat and stick and wish good night.

Whatever Aunt Barbara might feel at heart, Lucretia's joy at thus seeing Warren return to them was far greater than her surprise. At any moment since they had first parted, she would not have been the least astonished had he walked in unannounced, knowing what her sister Elizabeth was, and the kind of soul she would have to deal with in her nephew. Well she knew the trial it would be to him to have to minister at her shrine, for humbly minister he must, ever to attain the noble end he had in view. That end, left to her own will, he never should have taken a step towards Hillborough to arrive at; but she had yielded to other's judgment, possibly better than her own, less a great deal in the hope of its ever benefitting herself, than that justice in the end would be done him, and be the fruit at once of his own devoted labour and affection.

Nor did the weekly letters of love ever deceive her. The self-sacrifices they told of, far more a great deal than of aught else,

made those saturdays at once the happiest and yet the saddest of her journalings. Though there were no complaints, where was the characteristic cheerfulness and genuine pride and joy in them there ought to have been ? Sedulously avoiding any word that he thought might give her pain, where could she find a line in which the record of his own silent sufferings was not ? Try to cheer her as he would, what single hour of true happiness had his pen told her since he took up his abode under that mammon-roof ? till Alice Harlowe appearing like an angel in his path, of course Hillborough then became a perfect paradise on earth, and The Hermitage almost as blissful a little Eden as their own.

Still, Aunt Betty was the same. No half homage would do for her. "Strange, that she seemed to wink as much as she did at those Hermitage visits—it was so contrary to her character ! Poor boy ! well if she were not spreading some snare to catch him. Oh ! would he were but in the way to gain an honest living, as his soul longed for, by the free exercise of its own un-

fettered energies. That would be wealth indeed worth working for!"

In truth, since the death of her husband, Lucretia had never built on the certainty of a shilling from her Hillborough relations. The annuity she had ever regarded as an act of grace, but which might be discontinued, for offence taken, at any moment. She knew she had irreconcilably offended them by her marriage against all Westministerian laws, and what crushing vows that act of disobedience had brought down on her. From Andrew she certainly had expected some provision at his death, as he had always been kinder to her than any of the others; but supposed it was with him, as it was with most of his race—he had put off making his will too long; or, rather, when he had made it, in the heat of anger perhaps, in Timothy and Elizabeth's favour, had delayed, till it was too late, to give her and Warren that tardy justice in it which she was told he had intended. From Timothy she had got more than she ever looked for—a death-bed thought, at all events, and a recommendation to sister Betty's tender mercies. But was it likely,

although that last act of dying compunction was so far heeded, Betty would ever find, in the noble, open, unselfish heart she had taken into training, the fit materials wherewith to form a Westminster? And, if not, what, with spirit like Warren's, would come of it?

What had come—his sudden return to them, as she had anticipated; “and,” said Lucretia, in her heart, “God be thanked for it, too—His will be done!” And, so saying from its very core, off she tripped with Esther and Martha, to help get the well-aired sheets on the white tent-bed, and the room just as it looked the last night he slept in it before he said “good-bye to the roses.” And, that done, she must be hanging over his mantle-shelf by a nail and ribbon, so that he must see it as he entered, a little effusion of her own, penned one night in sadness before she laid her head on her pillow, and which Peter had insisted on her setting to a favourite old Bavarian sacred melody she had somewhere among her hymns, so that they might sing it together of an evening when Warren came home. This was it; and, judging by her own heart

what sort of melody his would be singing that night, she might have selected a hundred others, and not so well have touched the chord she wanted.

At all events, vanity could have had nothing to do with anything so simple and unpretending as the following :—

“ When my soul with sorrow rack'd,  
In its trouble comfort lack'd,  
I did to my God repair,  
And he heard my earnest pray'r :  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah !  
For He heard my earnest pray'r .

“ Then I told Him all my heart,  
And His grace He did impart ;  
Till my trouble it did cease,  
For with Him I was at peace :  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah !  
For with Him I was at peace

“ So, I rais'd my voice on High,  
And to Him again did cry :—  
Keep me, keep me, *blest as now,*  
No more grief then shall I know :—  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah !  
No more grief then shall I know.”

And, yet, simple as they were, they had a melody and a meaning for Warren, sent such thrills of genuine joy through his soul that he would not have exchanged that

night for all the melodies under heaven. And sing it he did in his heart again and again, and again ; till, lulled to sleep :—“ his mother stood beside him in his dreams, clad in dazzling white vesture, and looking so divinely beautiful and happy, she seemed rather an Angel from Heaven than an inhabitant of earth ! But she smiled on him, and then he knew she was his mother, his own beloved mother. And she bent over him, and kissed his cheek, and blessed him with a mother’s blessing—blessed him twice. And he felt he was blessed. And a loud hallelujah took up his gushing thanks on high ; and all the air was one joyous shout of hallelujahs. And oh, he could have listened for ever to that exquisite music, it was so heavenly !”

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SENTENCE.

*Warren is found guilty of being a fool in the  
World's eyes.*

AFTER a sweet night's rest, Warren was up betimes, and off, with his new rod and reel, to breakfast at the Parsonage.

Peter was in his garden, and received him with his usual kindness ; but there was a shade more of thoughtfulness in his look than was customary when he was among his pea-stickings and early cucumbers.

Warren expected no less ; and was very glad when, breakfast over, Peter turned the conversation to Hillborough and the Harlowes, and as good as said, "he was ready to hear anything he wished to tell him."

Then came out a full, true, and particular account of it all ; but so short, and succinct, and simple, and earnest, that Peter did

not play the devil's-tattoo with his foot once, or rub his chin, or his forehead, but sat attentively listening to the end, in a manner, had he done the same, as the Vicar, to his curate, supposing he had had one, preaching in Roxbury pulpit, would have been very encouraging to the young man, and a good lesson to those rectors and vicars in particular, who forget that they were youngsters once themselves, when they yawn and shift, and fidget about from side to side in their desks,—because—but they best know why they do it themselves;—only some sharp-eyed folks looking on—there is the scandal of it—may fancy it is hardly setting them a very good example."

And now coming to a full stop:—"Is that all?" asked Peter, merely shifting a knee.

"Yes."

"Very well. It's lucky for you you had some regard for modesty, and did not come dashing and splashing it over us in a post-chaise and pair but pulled up as you did at "The Six Bells," and showed your face among us like a decent, decorous young man ought—so, here's my hand on that. And,

now the next question is, do I think you a fool? Archibald Sharpe and Christopher Griggs do, that's clear. And there's some show for it, too. A million, more or less, at your service, and you won't have it—that looks queer. Won't bow down to their golden idol, not for a million? 'Gad, then, you must be cracked! Why, Sir Bradley Bellshaw, Bart, would ride from York to London, without hat or wig, and her Ladyship dance a minuet with a monkey for a thousandth part of it. Mad, yes, isn't it evident? Keep a maniac like you about her? Keep a stark-staring lunatic, that don't know on which side even his bread's buttered, to feed and provide for—that's likely, is it? Bad case! So we must take you in, must we? Find an asylum for you in Rexbury? See what we can do for you there? Come to that has it? Let's look at you. Nothing much amiss as far as that goes. But you madmen are so artful. Well, we must try what can be done to send you out killed or cured, for we're not going to have any lunatics long about us, I can tell you."

"Then, your verdict, please your Rever-

ence—being judge and jury both?"—humbly craved Warren.

"Is—GUILTY, of being a fool in the world's eyes, Warren Woodford."

"And the sentence, please your merciful Reverence?"

"Is this:—That if within this day ten years, you, Warren Woodford, do not prove the world to be wrong; then, and in that case—that judgment shall go by default; and Peter Borrington, clerk, and justice of the peace, to whom it now falls to pass this sentence on you, shall be shut up as a madman, in your stead, for the remainder of his days—won't that do?"

"Do, sir," cried Warren, with sparkling eyes, and wringing the Vicar's hand. "Yes, if that don't do to make me set the Thames on fire someday, nothing will."

"You won't see me locked up for a lunatic, if you can help it?" smiled Peter. "Good. I will trust you. So, now fetch your hat, and come and help me brew a cup of coffee for old Jenny Jeffs across common, and find if the doctor has been to-day. Ah! what's this?" taking up the fly-rod from the hall-table,—"a Hillborough purchase?

What a smart one ! If you're for a throw to-day, I know of a five-pounder, if he's an ounce, in the mill-tail water."

" Ah ! in the old spot close by the willows ? If that's where you mean, I'm afraid he'll never rise to fly again," said Warren, and out came the story of the old gentleman and his servant Mark.

" How is it you did not tell us before," asked the Vicar, struck seemingly.

" I forgot all about it last night, and no wonder."

" Had he small, deep-set, keen grey eyes, a high-arched nose, and a scar on one cheek ?" asked Peter.

" Yes."

" And flowing white hair over his snuff-brown coat-collar, and spoke very mildly, but with the air and manner of high birth, as if accustomed to be obeyed."

" Exactly. And a very pleasing tone and manner I found it, I assure you."

" Ah ! And was staying at The Bury ?"

" So he said."

" Then leave the rod and reel here, and mind and say nothing about them to your mother, Warren."

Warren stared, as well he might.

" You would let them drop, as though a viper had stung you, if you knew whose property they were."

" What do you mean ?"

" You have heard talk of the Marquis of Hardencore ?"

" Good heavens ! Who shot my father in the duel ?"

" The same. That's the man, sir. It was he gave you that rod and reel."

Warren turned pale as death, and they fell from his hand at Peter's feet.

Peter picked them up. " All the same, let us be just in our judgments," said he. " It is not the dead-shot in the *duello* is always the most to blame."

" True," returned Warren, with trembling lip " But in this instance, clearly, the Marquis was the aggressor."

" How ?"

" Surely, for offering gross insult to my mother ; but for which my father might have been alive at this hour."

" Still, let us be just," repeated Peter. " Though no one will excuse the Marquis's conduct, the first blame lay with your father,

Warren. Yes, and he would own it himself, if he could come and talk with us at this moment. Too intent on his own thoughtless pleasure, he left your mother alone in a shop at night, long enough to be the mark of a titled *roué*. What followed was natural enough. Had your father been by her side, as he ought to have been, instead of at the billiard-table, of course no insult had been offered, and no duel taken place."

"But he persisted," fired Warren, now flushing crimson at the thought; "he persisted, sir, in his ungentlemanly insolence, when he must have very well known he was mistaken."

"*Roués* are *roués*, my dear Warren, old or young, clever or clumsy; and modest and lovely women, like your mother, must not be running after their truant-husbands, all alone in London streets, by gas-light."

"Certainly not. But my father could have done no otherwise, under the circumstances, than he did—hurled him into the kennel?"

"Nor, as the code stands, the Marquis as did he, I suppose—to send him a

challenge next morning for it. And now again I say, let us be just. Putting aside all personal feeling in the matter, my dear Warren, as far as the morality of the thing goes, was there a pin to choose between them? They met, both thirsting for each other's blood. Providence saved them from the first fire. They *would* have another. We know the result. It but redounded to the shame of both. Your father made expiation on the spot. The Marquis has yet to make his. God is ever just. We had best leave the scales in His hands."

They walked on some paces in silence.

"What ought I to do, sir?" resumed Warren; "shall I return them?"

"Certainly not!" replied Peter. "There was grace in the act. It tells a good tale with a right moral. I like him the better for it. No, keep them. Or, rather, let me keep them for you for the present. Hereafter your dear mother, too, may look at them without a pang. And now, let's be thinking of something else.—I suppose we must allow you a good month's run-loose before we ask you what you mean to do with yourself in earnest?"

"I can tell you that, if you wish to know," returned Warren, "without waiting another moment."

"Ah! the old story? Not got over that yet? Stick to it still?"

"Yes, closer than ever."

"Then, I will own to you," said Peter, evidently more pleased than he chose to show; "it might just be done, if Aunt Barbara would get that pretty pair of epaulettes out of her head, which have been dangling in it ever since her brother, the old General, took her to court with him, full fig, that last drawing-room, and come down handsome."

"Indeed—how?"

"Oh, hasn't your mother told you of the little Gerard Potter-purse she has been working like a slave, at ever since you left her?"

"Not a word."

"There, isn't that like her? Well, you will see by and bye I daresay. Wonderful! Sold all of them as soon as sent. Never was such luck! And all to the same buyer. You don't know how rich we are."

Warren's breast heaved, and something

danced before his eyes that almost blinded him for a moment.

"Yes, only get those epaulettes out of aunt Barbara's noddle," went on Peter, "and it may be done—done without difficulty."

"Do you really think so?"

"Have patience. This Hillborough business must first blow over. A million's a million, as your friend John Dorking says. She can't yet quite stomach either, that mechanic's apron, as she calls it."

"I could pay back the six hundred twice over in a few years?" said Warren, elatedly.

"Twice? Twenty times, God willing, or I wouldn't give a button for you. But now, let's see what sort of a hand you are at a cup of coffee, while I go up and ask how the poor leg is. Jenny's berries, mind, are not Mocha; but that's no reason you shouldn't boil the milk, if you can find a pipkin anywhere to put it in. You havn't been in France yet? Ah? then you never tasted coffee. Go into the poorest French hovel, and see if they would give you cold milk with your coffee? They know better."

Jenny's leg was getting on nicely. And

Jenny "had never drank such a cup of coffee as that Mr. Woodford had just brought her up in all her life!" Yes, and though the Vicar had only just breakfasted, he must have a cup, too, as well as Warren :—and that was just how it was, Peter, a true pastor, went about from cottage to cottage, making them smack their lips, and thank their stars for what God had given them.

And now followed such a long round of it, that it was full half an hour after Aunt Barbara's usual luncheon-time before they got home again. Then, Lucretia might well smile delighted at the fresh roses, though, with all her seeming gaiety, to the full as much on thorns to hear what the verdict, was that was coming, as Aunt Barbara herself ; who, piqued a little at Peter's high spirits, maintained a dignified indifference with her knife and fork which palpably she did not feel, and which at last struck Peter as so funny, that he begged to know "if she or Mrs. Woodford had aught further to say—why the verdict should not be at once taken, and sentence passed, as promissed on the culprit before them, Warren Woodford ?

Certainly, Aunty "had a great deal to say further, if she chose."

"The court was all attention. But time pressed. Would she be so kind as to choose to be brief, and come to the point?"

"No, no—Barbara Woodford was not going to be caught, or coughed down, in that way."

"The time of the court, then, could no longer be wasted. The verdict was GUILTY."

Aunty thumped the table for joy.

"Silence!"

"GUILTY—of being a fool in the world's eyes."

Audible applause from the the culprit's mother, Lucretia Woodford.

"Silence!"

Sentence of the court :—"That if within ten years of this day, you, Warren Woodford, now found guilty of being a fool in the world's eyes, do not prove the world to be wrong, then that judgment shall go by default; and I, Peter Borrington, clerk, and justice of the peace, on whom it now devolves to pass this sentence on you, shall be shut up as a madman, in your stead, for the remainder of my days. So, God save the King, and there's an end on't."

"End of it? No, not till, in common honor," cried Warren, jumping up and seizing a hand each of his mother and dear Aunty, and pressing them to his lips, "I have redeemed the pledge thus nobly made for me:"—and, fairly taken by storm, Aunty opened her arms—Lucretia fell into them; and there ensued such kissings and congratulations, that Peter might well take it to heart a little:—"It was not that he wished in any measure to abridge their honest joy, that was natural enough; but why the prospect of seeing him shut up some day in a madhouse for the remainder of his days, should make them all of a sudden so exuberantly happy, was what he thought, however they felt about it, they might have kept to themselves, at all events, till his back was turned, if only out of decent courtesy."

## CHAPTER VII.

### MONEY'S WORTH.

A FORTNIGHT of Warren's scamper untethered with rod and line was hardly over, when, returning one morning from an early pony galop over to the next village for some fishing tackle, his mother met him at the gate with a letter in her hand, addressed to Warren Woodford Esq. &c, &c, and bearing the London post mark. Warren tore it open ; and the surprise of them all may be conceived, when, having ran his eye eagerly over it, he read out as follows :—

“ Basinghall Street, &c. &c.

DEAR SIR,

The inclosed bill at five days sight, for Six Hundred Pounds, payable at our office, will be duly honored on your per-

sonal presentation of the same any day next week before 4 p. m.'

"We beg to add, that, as our instructions are merely to put you in possession of this amount, without mention of the party from whom it comes, we trust you will spare us the necessity of declining, to give any information thereon. At the same time, we are permitted to express a hope, that its acceptance, as the free gift of a friend, may be agreeable, as also of service to you in any way you may think best to use it."

"Your very obedient servants,  
BENNETT & BLACKMORE."

Here was strange matter all of a sudden for surprise and speculation! They might well stare bewildered at each other. But that availed nothing to unriddle the mystery. What could it mean? Who had been so magnificently kind? Why was it sent?

A sudden thought struck Lucretia. "Depend on it, it comes from Aunt Betty, as a wind up of accounts between us."

"I shouldn't wonder!" exclaimed Warren, turning pale. "I know she overheard

me once say to John Dorking, or Gideon did, which is the same thing, that I would take six hundred for my million."

"Depend on it she has taken you at your word," agreed Lucretia, agitatedly in spite of her assumed composure. "But what a strange way for her to adopt. Prescott always did their London agencies.

"Yes, but don't you see the reason of that?" cried Aunt Barbara, sniffing the air? "The wily old thing! She didn't choose to say, point blank—there's the money—there's your six hundred—there's your discharge—take it, and be off, and don't come troubling me ever again; no, no, she knew better than that. Don't you see—done, as she done it, through third parties,—how she has left herself a loop-hole to creep out of if she wants? And, if not, she can go to her rest, can't she, with a clear conscience? And Timothy's ghost ever come haunting her? Not it. A pity though, while she was about it, she didn't make it thousands."

"As it is, it is six hundred pounds more than I ever reckoned on," said Lucretia. "But how unkind never to have written a line in answer to any of our letters! What

more could Warren have done, than he has done, even granting she had cause of complaint against him for leaving her so abruptly, which perhaps she had ? He has made all the amends in his power. He admitted, he acted hastily ; and so put it to her, that the door was open for a reconciliation, had she been so minded but no, not a word. And now this is to clear off all scores between us, I suppose, and we are to trouble her no more. Well, we must up all the more that's all, and exert overselves, and do the best we can to set in motion those powers, Warren, of your own, thank God ! which millions, if you, had them, could not give you, nor the loss of them take away."

" That's true !" applauded Peter, when it was repeated to him an hour afterwards. And taking the letter home with him, he conned it calmly over at his leisure ; and had his own thoughts about it, which he kept to himself ; not deeming it necessary at present to confide them even to Lucretia.

And going the following Tuesday with Warren to Basinghall Street, there, sure enough, they were most courteously received

by a tall, middle-aged gentleman, in black coat and waistcoat and pepper and salt trowsers and a frilled shirt; and, the business on which they came despatched, as courteously bowed out, without an observation beyond “the charming day it was;” but with a roll of new crisp bank-notes in Warren’s pocket book, value six hundred pounds sterling, British money, which made amends for it.

Their sensations, going along Cheapside, were very exhilarating—first taking them into Birch’s for a plate each of mock-turtle; then into a silversmith’s near, for that little hair broach set round with goodly pearls, which Warren had been thinking of ever since he opened his eyes that morning, as a something would look so handsome on his mother’s black-velvet dress that he meant to give her; as also for the embossed-silver and crystal flower-vase, for her boudoir round-table, which, over the soup, he and Peter had agreed, “would be likely to hit aunt Barbara’s taste as well as anything.”

An hour thus passed at the jeweller’s left them yet time and plenty to wait on Sir Hiron King at his City offices; and the reception they meet with there, too, might

well send Warren back home again overjoyed ! and so full of the Londoners' praises, that it was lucky Peter popped the filagree flower-vase in its place on the table just at the moment he did, while Aunt Barbara's back was turned ; for she was going to fly out at such "nonsensical rhapsodies," as she called them, when, her eyes lighting on it, up flew her arms, and all London might have come to her heart, and welcome, for the whole of the next week afterwards.

Then was the mother's turn ; and, placing the roll of new crisp bank-notes in her lap—what must Lucretia do but sit, like a goose, and cry over them—cry, as though she had nothing in the world but them to be proud about—no little Gerard Potter-purse up stairs, the making of which had robbed her cheeks of all their roses, that Peter could verily vouch for, for many a long month past, and caused more words between the three than Aunty meant to forget in a hury—no fruits of the work of her own hands to look at--no help for it but to eat the bread of dependence for the future like an idler.

This drew a wink from Peter ; and then

a little whispering in his mother's ear from Warren, while, with magic quickness, he fastened the broach to her bosom; but, if he thought to stop the tears by so doing, he was never more mistaken in his life; and Peter's delight at seeing them flowing, nay, as Aunty said, "at counting every drop as if they were being shed for himself, was one of those extraordinary features in his character, which she hardly knew whether to attribute to a heart hard as adamant, or sillily soft and susceptible as her own, God help her!"

However that might be, the scene then enacting was one of those that Peter's heart did seem to feast on greedily; and, even Aunty confessing that, barring the Infant Samuel Cameo, set by Mortimer, which she herself had given her, she had never seen a pearl-broach to please her better, and that it did Warren's good taste much credit,—certainly his, Peter's heart, had food that day to satisfy its utmost cravings, what with one joy or another.

"It seems like a dream, don't it," smiled Lucretia, replacing the notes in the pocket-book, and taking another loving look in the

glass at what she would not have exchanged for all Betty's wealth put together.

"To me rather a palpable fact," differed Peter.

"There I agree," chimed in Aunt Barbara ; "substantial very!"

"The question is, what's the best thing to do with it?" asked Peter.

"There's but one right way, that I know of," replied Warren.

"Yes, there are two," differed Peter :— "either, to give it to me and the churchwardens, to repair the church tower and chancel with, and help build a new schoolhouse ; or, come to terms, out of hand, with Sir Hiron, and ease my mind a little of that mad-house."

"What?" cried Aunt Barbara ; "ever give you and that Joe Pocock a shilling, to go meddling and modernising and playing your mad tricks with that beautiful old tower and chancel?"

"As you please about it. Only don't blame me if ever they come down crumbling about your ears."

"No, I won't, that's a promise. I say—don't you remember how Joe Pocock teased

me to strip off the old brown thatch ; and there was the Woodburn farm burnt to cinders last Michaelmas, and just new tiled and slated every roof of it ? ”

“ I did but throw out a suggestion,” said Peter.

“ Yes ; and, about a new school-house, too—what in pity’s name do we want with that ? What more could you cram their poor little heads with than you do now, if you had twice the room ? Unless, may be, you thought of a class for specially teaching them how best to turn out *useful* bodies in the world some day, when they had to get their own living. Mind you, it must come to that. And mind, I don’t say but what a little more elbow-space, and a little more air, and a little more light, would be as well. They might. But one thing I do mean to bargain for, before you get a six-pence of my money towards it ; and that is, that you don’t hang the walls all over with nothing but scripture lessons. Yes, scripture lessons, Mr. Borrington. You want them to love their Bibles, don’t you ? Then don’t be always setting them tasks in them. I know what book, when I was a

little girl, I loved least in the world—my New Testament. And why? Because my silly governess, whenever I was a naughty child, put both of us into a corner together, and never would let me come out till I thoroughly hated my companion so, I could have torn it with my teeth."

" Such weighty matters as those," Peter must allow, " deserved their best consideration, and should have it, directly they touched her little subscription; till when he lived in hope, that if ever the good work was undertaken, it would be found in all its branches and bearings worthy of the highly prized support and patronage of Miss Barbara Woodford. It seemed clear, however, that he and the churchwardens must forego this present six hundred pounds in hand. Wherefore, he now moved, that it should forthwith be transferred to the hands of Sir Hiron King, who had as good as promised them interest a hundred fold."

'Warren begged to second that resolution.'

Lucretia held up both hands.

Strange organ of contrarieties the human heart! For the last ten days there had Aunt Barbara been for whole half hours at

a time at her private papers, doing little addition and subtraction sums out of number, to prove, or not, whether she could and ought to put the best face on it, and come down with that six hundred. Had it been for a pair of epaulettes, scarcely any calculation would have been needed—a cheque on Child's would have been the easiest matter possible; but that mechanic's "apron" was a sore point; and, so, back went the papers again and again, and the result with them, as far off solution, apparently, as ever.

Now, however, that there was no more necessity for any further concern about it, and there the money was fallen into their laps as from the clouds, Aunt Barbara absolutely felt piqued a little, and almost inclined to pick a quarrel with Peter, because they were, so far, independent of her, and her closettings and calculations had come to nothing. Aunty loved power and patronage; and, "altogether, they were going on in a way very unusual, and which did not best please her, and that she should take leave to tell them plainly.

Peter comforted her by showing, "that

so far from any stop being put to the little calculations, he had made out a list that morning for her approval, of a few things would be indispensable, over and above Messrs. Seeley & Beecroft's bit of parchment, to fit him out and set him off like a gentleman."

" Gentleman!" faintly echoed Aunty, the 'apron' standing out in bold relief.

" Yes, that's the word," accorded Peter, gleefully; "the real *generosus*, the only true nobility!"

" I suppose I must believe it," sighed Aunty. And now, finding she was still to be somebody in the business, there was no end to the fresh airs she gave herself. But there was so much grace in them, they were, moreover, so harmless, and full of self-sacrifice, that Peter declared, " he had never seen her put on anything became her more; and would be proud to go with her wherever she choose to lead him, from shop to shop, and carry home for her, too, whatever she liked to cram his pockets with."

Matters thus ripe, it only remained to attend the pleasant little meeting of principals at Messrs Seeley & Beecroft's; which

terminating most agreeably, Warren found himself in possession of a document, that, although it was to make him some day as great a man as Sir Hiron, and perhaps greater, he had only given six hundred pounds for—dirt cheap, as even Aunt Barbara granted, going back to the hotel, after one of the pleasantest evenings she had ever spent in her life at Lady King's.

“And the ‘apron’ did not distress you at all?” asked Peter.

“Quite the gentleman — the polished gentleman,” exclaimed Aunty.

Our sunniest days, however, in this life, are seldom quite cloudless. Among the letters waiting their return home, was one from John Dorking to Warren:—“wisely timed,” Peter declared, “to keep the scales even—just to moderate that too great brightness which fancy is often apt to surround itself with, till it becomes so dazzled it can see nothing, poor blind-sighted creature, but its own glory.”

John’s letter was characteristic. “It had been written by snatches, as he could find time and get a chance at nights after they had gone to bed. But even then he had

to take care Betty did not come creeping up and spying the light of his candle under the door, for she pried and prowled about after them worse than ever. Her temper was dreadful ! No one could do anything with her but that Gideon, and he not always. The life they led was most wretched. But for one tie he would cut it to-morrow, if he cut himself out of every shilling.

“ Her rage was awful ! when she found he, Mr. Warren, had left. She never expected he would have taken her at her word. At one time they thought she would have broken a blood-vessel. All her spite fell upon poor Letty—it always did, happen what might. But it was beautiful to see how she bore it—with such true Christian patience, and fortitude, and cheerfulness. She was an angel, if ever there was one, on earth, for none but an angel could bear and forbear as she did every hour of the day.

“ Betty’s wrath had calmed down a little now ; but she was still so savage at times, she was ready to turn them all out of doors any moment if they displeased her. What she meant to do about him, Mr. Warren, was more than he, John, could say. It quite

worried him to think of it. He wished to goodness he, Mr. Warren, would think it well over, and not dash down the splendid fortune would be sure to be his by and bye, if he would only pluck up courage and put that young limb's neck out of joint. There was where he, John, feared most. She had been twice to Archibald Sharpe's last week, and the 'he, he, heing' all over the house ever since was quite disgusting.

"And, to show how capricious and changeable she was, nothing now went down but the Harlowe's, at "The Hermitage;" which made him think the young villain had put it to Betty, about 'the monkey and his mistress,' as if he, Mr. Warren, had said it, and not Mrs. Harlowe. There was no plumbing the depth of his rascality.

"Poor Miss Harlowe! Every one knew where her heart was. But it was not so much where her's was, he feared, as where her mother's was. He was afraid it was with her, as with too many others in this mercenary world—what will you give?—the highest bidder to be the buyer. Worship wealth? Yes, didn't she as much as

any of them? Would he believe it? his Aunt and Gideon dined there the other day. He led her about by the nose just where he liked, the same as he did his monkey.

"And, talking of that, there was a pretty to-do with them last Thursday, had nearly got the brute a good cudgelling. He wished it had, and had broken every bone in his skin. Just as tea was coming on, Lady Bellshaw dropped in for a chat. Betty would make her take a cup and a bit of muffin. She sent Bibbs out for the muffin on purpose, and Letty put in an extra tea-spoonful, too. Her ladyship had not enjoyed anything so much, she could not tell for how long. A cup of tea and bit of hot muffin in that snug, homely, happy way, was a treat she never got now. Sir Bradley seldom drank it. He preferred coffee, which, between themselves, she wouldn't give a pin for. Where did Betty buy her tea? Her's was nothing to equal it. 'At Luke Gibson's.' 'How much a-pound?' 'Four and nine-pence.' 'Was that all? Would Miss Gordon have the kindness to write the name and

address down on a card, that she might not forget. Most assuredly she should deal at Luke Gibson's for the future.' 'Ready money only there, mind,' said Betty.

"The muffin had got cold while they were talking. Her ladyship would take one little bit more. So, Letty had just put it on the toasting-fork, to warm by the kitchen fire, as Bibbs was up stairs, when master Cripple, who had been watching for a chance, came behind her, and snatching it off, ran munching it—Letty after him with the toasting-fork—into the parlour. Up jumped Betty, scarlet with rage—for this was a sort of thing she wouldn't stand—and, seizing the fork out of Letty's hand, beat him over the head with it with all her might; till, giving him a prick, he turned on her like a tiger, wrenching it out of her hand, and, springing suddenly on her, if Gideon had not rushed at him and pinned him by main force to the floor, as sure as fate he would have had his revenge, very likely put her eyes out. Never was seen anything like it. Her ladyship flew out of the door into her carriage; Betty into the kitchen; Letty behind

his, John's right arm, which she nearly squeezed black and blue in her terror ; while Gideon, with his bloody hand, fought away like a maniac ; till, fairly exhausted, Cripple gave in, and, poor beast ! was lugged to bed without his supper for his insolence.

" Archibald did not say how much exactly the poor lame hand in the sling was worth after Betty's call next day ; but he, John, could guess the young miscreant had made a precious good thing, of it, and was getting on at a pace would make them all stare one of these days, if a stop was not put to it.

" This weighed more on his, John's mind than all the rest. To think for a moment that a crafty young villain like that should snap his fingers at them all as he was doing, was enough to drive any one frantic. But if Mr. Warren would be advised, he would, as he, John, said before, stomach the affront, and come back and shake hands and make it up. That was his advice, and Letty's, and good advice, too, he thought.

" If, however, it was not to be ; the next thing to be thought of was, what had best be done about a certain young lady up at a place they called The Hermitage ? For

though he, Mr. Warren, might not care to 'worship the wealth,' as he called it, he, John, knew very well the price he put on that precious treasure there! yes, and what he would think and feel if somebody else put a higher. He repeated, Miss was not Mamma—a million was a million. 'Faith! he must speak out, if he died for it:—rather, then, than ever come to that, rather than ever let that hideous wretch of a thing carry her off, if he had a fancy for her—should he, John, tell him what he would do?—Some night, when the moon smiled, do as his, Mr. Warren's father once did with his mother—be off with her to the first convenient church, and put a gold-hoop on her wedding-finger, and settle it that way."

Altogether, if there was much to alarm, there was something to console and comfort also in John's letter. And, sitting down full of it, Warren relieved his heart of a heavy load, which alone was wanting to dispel the dark cloud that had been hanging over it.

To John's remark, that "Miss was not Mamma," and that "a million was a million," Warren had but one answer to make, and it was all sufficient for him, and

this was it :—‘It would be quite time enough for him to despair,’ as Alice said, ‘when the time came;’ so, John need not trouble his kind heart any more for him on that score.”

And now the month’s holiday was over.

Duty called, and duty must be obeyed.

“ Farewell then—all farewell !”

Yes, and a right glad and joyous farewell, too, without one heart-pang. Tears enough in all conscience, but not a bitter one—a happy return alone beaming in every look. That was a good-bye which Peter’s breast might proudly swell at, and did.

Yes, and Lucretia’s, too ; though, to have seen her and Aunt Barbara mingling together at the last moment, anyone would have supposed, who had not guessed the meaning of it all, that there was some cause of mutual grief, forsooth, between them instead of glory.

“ A different sort of good-bye this rather ?” said Peter, as Dick Acre slammed to the hind-boot ; “ rather different, eh, Warren, to that good-bye, once upon a time, to the roses ?”

“ Yes, yes,” cried Warren ; “ but I shall

dream of them, all the same, to-night if I can."

"Got it safe—sure?" called out Peter, touching his left breast as they dashed off.

"All right," nodded Warren, diving a hand down, and then flourishing a paper packet over his head.

"Right enough!" crowed Peter's heart in return. "Yes, cheap as dirt. The best six hundred—Heaven multiply it—he, God bless him! will ever put out to compound interest."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### MASTER AND PUPIL.

THE limits assigned to this story, already much exceeded, give warning that there is space now left but for a very brief summary of what remains to be told of it.

The reader is requested, then, to suppose that about five years have passed since Warren became a member of Sir Hiron King's family ; for by his exemplary conduct and endearing manners he soon was treated more like one of his own sons than a mere pupil as were others.

Though those five years were to himself the most important of his life, and his mother and Peter Borrington never tire of telling of them and their heart-stirring details even to this day, as bright examples

worthy of all time, these remaining pages can do no more than record their pleasing main results, the steps to them being of a sort far more exciting and interesting to the actors themselves in the drama than the lookers on.

Sir Hiron King, born, though of good blood both on his father and mother's side, to no heritage but what he could carve out for himself, had risen to fame and fortune by his own talents and undaunted perseverance. He owed nothing to fortuitous circumstances, not an upward step in the ladder to eminence to an adventitious help. His childhood was singularly unhappy, his youth darkened by constant family anxieties, and his early manhood overcast with many cares. Not to be a burden on his friends, he had accepted an under clerkship in a merchant's counting-house ; when, going to take possession of his stool for the first time, he was told of the death of an uncle who had left each of his nephews five hundred pounds. He took his stool that day with his fellow clerks, but never after. Before a month he had bound himself, with his legacy, to the greatest civil engineer of his

day ; merely reserving, in pocket, enough to make such indispensable additions to his wardrobe as creditable appearances demanded, and a small supplemental sum with which to hold out till his leisure hours could be turned to some account.

Once started on the road he had chosen for himself, Hiron King never looked back. Forward And Fear Not was his motto. The future was his all of fortune, and the present in hand the only safe and sure way to it. He never wavered, never wearied ; but, steadily pressing on—on—on—with even step and nerve unflagging,—found himself one day at the covetted goal of his ambition—as great a man as his master ; and soon a knight, dubbed, at the footstool of his sovereign.

And now it was all plain sailing with him, and the rich fruits fell in on all sides. But rich Sir Hiron forgot not the needy days that had made him what he was, the early struggles had won for him the victory. And when Warren went with Peter Borrington and told him his story—he held out both hands to him, as he would have done to flesh and blood of his own ; and, we

know for certain, would have taken him, taken him to make a man of him, a man like himself—Warren wanted no more—even had he come *minus* by a hundred or more the usual fee which hundreds would have been but too ready with, and double, to have called themselves his pupils.

Warren Woodford, like his master, had a self-reliant principle of action that wonderfully assisted in the good work of making himself. It was but small trouble that Sir Hiron had with him.

“What pains you take with that young man,” would Lady King often say, a little piqued at the hours they would pass closetted together over their secret discoveries and experiments.

“Pains, my love? Pardon, I never took less pains with a pupil in my life. It is he takes the pains, not I. And, if I did, look at the profits!”

It is not always that men who have risen to professional greatness from humble beginnings, have most sympathy for beginners. Pride comes with possession, selfishness, ever jealous of encroachments with success; and, mindful most of what, if it remember, it

ought chiefly to glory at, not blush for, the false side of it, ever foremost, hating to look itself in the face, shirks its own form, however pleasing, wherever it meets it, and, so, repudiates the only part of itself has true grace in it.

Sir Hiron was not of this mind. Nothing seemed to please him better than to get Warren opposite him, and stare him full in the face ; and then, while joy lit up his own, to impart to him all the knowledge of which he was master ; and such wondrous secrets, yet to be made known for the world's welfare, that were enough almost to turn the brain of dolts and doubters. And then, linking arm in arm, he would lead him along with him wherever he went ; and, taking note of every thought and look, write to the Vicar, and predict such things, made his mother' heart bound ! and even Aunt Barbara, at last acknowledge, "of a certainty 'aprons' the like of them were somewhat different guess-sort of things to the coarse, dirty afairs Ralph Champion and his mates wore over *their* forges."

And so the happy years rolled away—rolled away so fast, that, whereas some

complained how long the days were, Warren's chief concern seemed to be how he could steal most from his rightful rest, without arousing good Lady King's watchful fears, and bringing his mother on him. On—on—he went—only asking the hour-glass to run a little slower—on—on, with eye fixed, and heart and soul intent on *his* one object, *his* highest ambition—to be as great a man as *his* master,—a greater he could not be.

And the Vicar got another letter from Sir Hiron, as the term of the indentures drew to its close, to say,—“Warren was his right hand, and he hoped to make it more worth his while to remain with him for the present, than to set up on his own account. That the times had come when such “right hands” need not fear for plenty of work, and liberal wages, too; and he should recommend him to take it. All the same, there was no harm in his making a bold strike for a fortune, if he saw a chance; and for the little wife and snug suburban retreat, too, if his tastes lay that way, with all convenient speed, at Dulwich, or Clapham Common.”

But two months more now, and Warren

would be his own master. His love for his profession was something singular, outstepping all ordinary bounds. So much so, that, Lady King, having a sweet girl, Emily, who sighed sometimes in his absence, and brightened at his return, would often twit him with it, and tell him, jokingly, "if he gave all his heart to the workshop, he would have none left for his wife."

For a time indeed it did seem that the day was far too short even to spare a thought for a certain far off 'Hermitage,' that once was the all in all. But if it so seemed, Warren knew better. And, Alice appearing to know so, too,—the "workshop" held him bound down in a manner might well raise doubts in Lady King's mind, when she looked at her sweet Emily, "whether, good as it was, Warren's was, in fact, quite the sort of nature suited for fond heart like her's; and whether, in truth, young Algernon Goldney, who would come in for all his bachelor banker-uncle's money one of these days, would not make her a better match?"

One thing' was unquestionable, Warren's progress startled every one. His thirst for knowledge! was so eager and insatiable,

his zeal so earnest and untiring, his insight into causes so keen, and deep, and accurate, and his results universally so successful, that, not to sing his praises further here, it will be enough to say—Sir Hiron ever would have it, “that one of the most important discoveries in modern railway engineering, for which he had the credit, ought to have been secured by patent to his pupil, Warren Woodford, and not to him.”

This was true. And perhaps to it were owing the splendid achievements—in the teeth of such difficulties often in his way as would have crushed ninety nine ordinary men out of a hundred—that marked his upward course; and have since been numbered among the wonders of the world, and raised him up an imperishable memorial, shall long outlive his noblest works.

Sir Hiron was right:—“the days were come when new and gigantic powers from the hitherto manacled hands of science were about to be let loose on the gaping world, and found a new era in the glorious history of Mechanics.”

The stupendous locomotive power of steam was beginning to rock the globe. The

whole social system was heaving with it. Its colossal strides knew no limits. It promised to compass the earth as with a single span. There was no resisting its sovereign rule and influence. Wise men hailed it with open arms as they would a tried friend, for fraternity was its pass word, universal freedom and progress its motto. Doubts and distrust soon gave way to certainty and confidence; ignorance awoke, electrified, from its prejudice and lethargy; till its foster-child fell prostrate and powerless, utterly ashamed of itself now that it was deserted by its parents.

Long and patiently had Sir Hiron waited, and watched his opportunity. And now, the course open, he rode boldly in, with his "Right Hand," as he called him, at his side—master of the field! "And now let the whole possee comitatus of noodles come and try and dispossess them, if they could."

Such a field was alone wanting to soul like Warren's. At a glance he saw its scope and character, and the rich harvests to be garnered from its skillful culture. But Warren's frame, though tough as heart of oak, was not quite iron; and, Lady King

"insisting on being heard, or she must and would write to his mother," Sir Hiron was forced to order "the break" to be put on for a while; "lest, at the pace he was going, he should—no, not outstrip him—though he should like to see him do that,—should lay himself on a sick bed, and not be able to see the new "Hercules" launched, which would go near to break his heart, and, so, rob the world of *somebody*.

To console himself, Warren wrote sheets full to John Dorking, which brought him an extraordinary sheet full in reply. John never professed to be a good correspondent, but had, nevertheless, seldom let a month pass without putting Warren in possession of all their goings on at Hillborough and about, which he thought would interest him. Nature had given John a feeling heart, and a tolerably sound understanding, as times went, but he plumed not himself on his penmanship; and, but that he felt he loved Mr. Warren as if he were his brother, and so did Letty with a true sister's affection, he would have as soon thought of flying as editing a regular series of epistolary intercourse once a month for any man living.

But friendship levels barriers, and develops hidden resources ; and, once in for it, John got on at a rate that quite astonished himself ; and what was at first a stif-fish task rather, soon became almost as indispensable a pleasure, in his leisure hours as his monthly letters of love and duty to his old doting mother ; both of which, viz., that directed to Mrs. Lloyd Dorking, somewhere in Herefordshire, and that to Warren Woodford, Esq., he made a point to post with his own hand at exact intervals of four weeks, nothing extraordinary occurring to prevent him.

At sight of John's old-English initials, Warren's eyes danced ; and, breaking the seal—here was a rich feast for them as heart could wish for. But the pith of it is all probably, the reader will care to know about.

“ Things went on with them,” said John, “ much in the same old hum-drum way. There was little variation of any sort to enliven them, unless it might be Betty's temper's, which kept stirring them up now worse than ever. Sometimes it was as much as mortal flesh and blood could bear. But it could not last for ever ; and then—ah ! there

was the rub—he expected some of them, who were crowing loud enough now would sing small rather, come that day. Let justice be done, and he wouldn't mind, nor Letty either, what they went through. Poor Letty's was no bed of roses. It was all thorns there. She was worn almost to a skeleton. The truth was, she never had enough to eat. He managed as often as he could to smuggle her in a bun or a slice of cake. He himself contrived to keep some flesh on his bones, but he dare no more let Betty get scent of his private bit of beef-steak broiling over the way, than be out ever in his castings-up on Mondays. Gideon was the only one got fat, but that was because he was always sneaking about from house to house, sponging for what he could get. What he was down for there was no telling, a pretty penny he would warrant. The pic-nics and pet-parties out of number he went to at Lowdon and The Hermitage all last summer, and was going to now again, let him, John, into a secret, better than all Archibald's shrugs and grunts.

“Perhaps Mr. Warren would not believe it, but it was as true as he was a living man

—the fellow was regularly making love to Betty. Yes, and Betty knew it, too, as well as any of them, and was so pleased, that she made quite an old fool of herself. Mr. Warren would excuse him for being plain. It really was enough to make a pig sick. Not that there was any likelihood of Betty ever marrying. Catch her at that. But it tickled her vanity to be courted—and by such a *handsome* young man, and so many lovely lasses everywhere dying for him, as he told her about ; including a certain young lady at The Hermitage, whose mother almost worshipped the soil on which he trod. Yes, that was a master-stroke of Gideons ! He must say, he was a consummately clever fellow, that Gideon, beat Archibald Sharpe hollow, and he was a shrewd one.

“They had had a good joke among them. Keep anything from Betty. She knew as well as anybody, the sly villain had an eye for Alice Harlowe. And what should she do but get Letty to turn her old peuce-poplin, and trick her up two new French caps like Lady Bellshaw’s, and roll-up her front hair in bows, as Queen Caroline wore hers in the prints, and come down on Sunday

with her face and neck powdered so thick, that when Griggs came in, he actually pretended he didn't know her at first, but made a low bow before he took a chair, as if he were at Lowdon ; which nearly throwing her into fits, they say he has made five thousand by it, if he has made a penny, and been quite wild about it with Mrs. G. and Archibald ever since.

But to be serious, as most became him, John, just then ; the one alone to be really pitied of them all, in his mind, was poor Miss Harlowe. He must speak out, or not at all. She was the mere wreck of what she was, as far as beauty went, and that was the truth of it. Letty said, 'it was not gone, and would all come back again more beautiful than ever ! go the right way about it.' He, John, could not tell. Perhaps so. Assuredly they were not going the right way then. What might happen, when she became Mrs. Gideon Wolff some day, it was impossible to predict. Possibly, with her own consent, she never would. But he repeated, Miss was not Mamma—a million was a million—if Mr. Warren had any account in it, he had better look to it. What

Letty meant by “preyings,” and “pinings,” was beyond his depth. Something was wrong—something must be very wrong, for a sweet face, that once was all sunshine and joy, now never to have a smile on it, never to have one rose or lily to show out of the endless succession that once delighted every eye to look at in such perfection.

“He, John, had delivered the Covent Garden parcel of roots and seeds into her own hands ; and, when he went up last, there she was over their beds, tending and talking to them as though they were her children. It was quite heart-cheering to him to see her, for it brought back dear old times ; not very old certainly, but old enough to remind him that the hour-glass was running on, and he should like very much for them all to draw that little earthly prize of happiness they had set their hearts on, if there was no harm in it, before it ran out.

“No, no—if that fond, faithful little heart there over her nurselings was beating for Gideon Wolff, call him, John Dorking, a fool, and let the wicked world come to an end. Bought hearts—what good were they ? Buy and sell goods like them at market ?

Yes, so they did often. And, when they got the article home, what was the worth of it? Often more to any one than its owner. Bought heart—call that a bargain? call that anything to treasure? call that home, sweet home? call dark light? cold heat? sorrow joy? falsehood truth? the shadow the substance? cinders bread? bitter sweet? hatred love?

“ Then, with only bread and water, and God’s grace on them, give him, John, a garret, with the woman he loved, and who loved him as he loved her; and though, may be, at market they might not fetch a crown the couple, should he tell Mr. Warren how much he should want for his little lot? Very well, so he would, if he could not guess; but, while he was about it, he had best bid pretty high, or he might as well bid nothing at all, for he wouldn’t have it.

“ And now John did not know that he had then anything more of interest to say. The Bellshaws were getting more friendly than ever. Sir Bradley had been away, in Italy, for six months. On the death of Lady Harriet, his Aunt, he would come in for

thirty thousand, they said. He hoped he might, for he thought they wanted it up there.

"Cripple was grown a monster; and so surly and savage, if teased, that twenty times Betty had all but made up her mind to part with him. They had had two or three more battles together, and it was as much as Gideon could do sometimes to keep peace between them. He, John, believed in his heart, the crafty knave set him on, on purpose to interpose, and take her part, and so have a further claim on her. He had driven a bargain with Knivett, the cutler, for a pocket sheath-knife, to please Betty, in case the brute ever really came to earnest. In conclusion, John could not sufficiently express what joy it gave him and Letty to hear of the colossal strides he, Mr. Warren, was making to fame and fortune. It was nothing more than they had both expected. And he was very much mistaken, if, in her heart, although she held her tongue, his aunt Betty was not as proud as any of them. He adhered to the same opinion still, that if he would only knuckle under a bit, and offer to shake hands, and

be a little yielding and agreeable, Gideon would have no more chance than the cowboy there out in the paddock. But, if this were not to be—the sooner he, Mr. Warren, made haste with the necessary preliminaries, and came, and, either by fair means or foul, made Miss Harlowe Mrs. Warren Woodford, the better. Yes, made haste. The time present was all we ever had to call our own. Many could not say even that as he could. There was no knowing what might happen. His Aunt was broken a good deal ; and the violent fits of temper she now gave way to, worse than ever, ‘would end,’ Griggs said, ‘before long in apoplexy, as sure as fate.’ She was getting bloated and wheezy, and Letty said, ‘her legs swelled so at times, she thought it must be dropsy.’

“So, he, John, respectfully recommended him, Mr. Warren, to make all convenient speed, and put the “poor pining heart,” as Letty called it, out of its misery, one way or the other--either by making it over, with a suitable speech, to the tender passion of Mr. Gideon Wolff; or, if nothing else would do, reducing to practice the little Gretna Green scheme they were talking

about—failing all legitimate overtures to a right understanding, first, with Aunt Betty."

Now, here was enough in all conscience to set the heart beating and the fevered brain on fire ; and, had John known how ill he was, Warren would never have received that letter. As it was, he grasped it tight in his hand, and read, and re-read it again and again, till the paper seemed on flames, and the letters to be dancing before his eyes like so many red-hot spectra ; when, sinking back on his pillow, he tried to shut them out by covering his face with his hands. But no, there they were still, dancing away, and getting larger and larger, spite of all he could do to drive them from his sight. And he felt he would give worlds could he but shed tears, for his heart was choking, but not a tear would come ; and, dashing the hair from his burning temples, who should meet his bewildered gaze, standing at his bed-side, but Sir Hiron King.

What could there be in that stern brow to melt a heart to weep ? But no sooner did Warren encounter it bent kindly on him than his whole soul gave way within him ; and, grasping the offered hand, he put

John's letter in it, and then felt no shame at the silent heralds that chased each other down his cheeks unchecked.

"Very well," said Sir Hiron, calmly, after having read it through; "there are just five things, it seems to me, you have to do, to be as happy as your friend John could wish you:—Trust in God—get well as fast as you can—put out your strength—make money enough—and then go and marry the girl, if she will have you."

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Yes, and when it happens that all of a sudden Fortune seems as if she could not fill fast enough the lap of the new favourite —though old as the hills what a freakish friend she is—dear, dear, what a hubbub it makes! what a raising of eyebrows! what a clatter of tongues! what speculations afloat! what old faults are forgiven! what new merits found out. Yes, and how the sly goddess enjoys it, and winks her eye, and laughs, and dances the while, and keeps dropping more and more in; till she almost turns the heads of them all, wondering, ‘whether their turn will ever come, too, and when?’

A yellow chariot, of peculiar build, designed for speed and ease, and drawn by a pair of light-greys, came sweeping full swing up Waterloo Place, a few days after Warren was well and out again; turned the corner of Charles Street into St. James’s Square; and, pulling up at a mansion therein, down went the steps, and out got a tall, stout, middle-aged, gentlemanly-looking man, of grave, yet genial aspect, with doctor A. No. 1. stamped on every inch of him; and, having exchanged courtesies with the

hall-porter, and then with Mr. Thrupp, the butler, straightway ascended to the bed-room of his noble patient ; and, taking a seat by his side, knew all that Mrs. Mitchell had to tell him before she had said a word.

“ The Marquis was not so well ; he had passed a very restless night ; wandered a great deal at times ; was so weak he could hardly raise himself up ; and took no nourishment at all.”

Presently up rattled another chariot, a dark green one with bright-bay horses ;—and, if divers counsellors could insure it, there was wisdom round the sick-bed. And then ensued a long consultation in the library ; in the midst of which entered Mr. Bennett, the noble Marquis’s solicitor and confidential agent.

And, taking him aside, Dr. Chempford told him plainly :—“ His noble client might live a few days longer ; but, if any of his worldly affairs yet remained unsettled, there was no time to lose ; he was sinking fast, and they must not count now on more than hours. He had ordered him some strong beef-tea, and would prescribe a composing

draught ; and then, if he got a little sleep, his mind would be calmer and more collected."

The beef-tea and the opiate did their work, and the Marquis slept tranquilly till evening ; when, opening his eyes and staring about him, he asked for Mr. Bennett.

Mr. Bennett was below, over his dessert with Mr. Fletcher his head clerk ; and, allowing about half an hour to elapse, not to seem too ready, he followed Mrs. Mitchell up stairs, as if in obedience to the summons.

The Marquis was evidently refreshed by his sleep, and was sitting half-up, supported by pillows ; and, though it was certain the glass of life was running fast out, there were yet some sands left, and Mr. Bennett hastened to make the most of them, to get executed, while he could, some deeds he had received instructions to prepare for many months past, but which, illness and irritability had prevented the Marquis signing ; little dreaming that when he took this time to his bed, he would never rise from it again.

Mr. Bennett pressed the trembling hand held out to him between both his, and there was a moment or two's mutual silence.

At length :—“ The papers,” said the Marquis, in a faint voice, pointing to a packet tied round with red tape on the little round table by the bed-foot ; whereupon, Mrs. Mitchell, at a look from the lawyer, wheeled it round nearer ; then left the room for three minutes ; and returning with Mr. Fletcher, and Thrupp, the butler, down they sat themselves, covered by the screen, to be within eye-reach when their services were wanted.

Mr. Bennett unfolded the parchments ; and Mrs. Mitchell having made a sort of desk with a baise-board which she placed before him, the Marquis nodded, and, taking the pen from her, looked up at Mr. Bennett.

“ Exactly according to this, your lordship’s memorandum,” said he, showing him the slip of paper as he spoke.

The Marquis took it in his left hand—held it shaking before his eyes, as if trying to read it—let it fall on the sheet—and, leaning back exhausted :—“ Can’t make out a word of it,” he muttered. “ Why do you write it all upside down ?”

There was no time to waste. Spreading the skins out flat before him, while Mrs.

Mitchell propped him up with another pillow, and adjusted his spectacles, and the witnesses in the background placed themselves in position:—"Will your lordship, then, please to sign now?" asked Mr. Bennett.

"Yes—yes—best done—done now—if I can"—receiving a fresh pen from Mrs. Mitchell,—"Let's see—here it is—how much for—for the boy, did I say?"

"First, five; then ten thousand—that's what you put down in the memorandum."

"Yes—ye—yes—ten—ten—so 'twas—te—ten—where—here?"

"Just there, yes," said Mr. Bennet, guiding the shaking hand to the seal.

"I deliver this as my act and deed."

It was done. The pen fell from his lordship's fingers. "Thank God!" he exclaimed; "now I feel happier;"—and, his head sinking on his pillow, from that hour he never spoke more; but lay, as in a state of utter exhaustion and unconsciousness, but apparently free from pain, seeming to know and care for nothing for three days longer, when he ceased to breathe; but so gradually, so gently, that not even Mrs. Mitchell, who

unceasingly watched by him to the last,  
knew the exact moment that he died.

Whether the Marquis of Hardencore's end was peace, Heaven only knows. With his last consciousness he declared he felt happier, now that he had made what expiation he could for the one deed of his life which seemed to torment him more than all the rest of his transgressions put together. And, surely, charity may indulge a hope, that, selfish and sinful as that heart had for the most part been through life, it would not have felt thus happier for such a deed of grace and justice, had it ceased to beat in all its hardness, instead of going to its account as it had done, making what atonement it could, by an act which could only have been prompted by a sense of deep sorrow and contrition.

Dispensation inscrutable! Yet, all His ways are ever just, and good, and full of tender mercy!

And now Peter Borrington could go and bring the fly-rod and reel down from their closet and place them in Lucretia's hand, and draw such a beautiful moral from the tale they told, that Frederick seemed to

stand before her as they talked, and to smile on them well pleased, as if the gift were to himself, and it had joined all their hearts for evermore in one Christian bond of mutual forgiveness and love.

But stranger things than Peter's moral of the reel and fly-rod had yet come to pass to make dear Aunty lift up her eyes and hands, and wonder what the world was coming to ; things not even dreamt of by Peter Borrington himself, with all his knowledge and experience.

And now, thus suddenly and unexpectedly enriched, well might Warren's heart bound within him at the thought of all it had already planned to do for his mother ; and of what would be Alice's joy, to hear of the match he should now be for Mr. Wolff. And siezing pen and paper, John Dorking's delight and Letty's may be easily conceived, when next day's post brought them the glad tidings ; and how Aunt Betty opened her eyes ; and Gideon his ears ; and how, quick as lightning almost, it got to Lowdon ; and "The Hermitage"; and all over the town ; till reaching Christopher Griggs, he rubbed his hands, and snapped his fingers at

Archibald, and punched John in the ribs, like a creature half out of his wits ;—for thought Griggs to himself, “ it never rains but it pours, they say—who knows what may come next ?—dash my wig !—swell at that rate much longer, she can’t be here this day six months.”

“ Ah, that secret’s out now,” smiled Mr. Bennett, grasping Warren’s hand, congratulatingly, which had just invested the Ten Thousand Pounds, *minus* deductions, in the 4 per cents. “ Our instructions were not to tell, and we behaved admirably, didn’t we ? You thought me a dry, crusty old curmudgeon, I dare say. Well, you made a noble use of the six hundred, anyhow. Put out the rest to as good an interest, and you needn’t fear ever coming to the workhouse. And, by the bye, the Marquis did the thing handsomely ! His fortune was not what it used to be. It was a noble act ! You think so ? Yes, and so do I. It made his last hours happy. Well, now then, good bye, and Heaven bless you. Stay, though—stay a moment—I’ve another secret, so I have, to tell you —wait—what’s o’clock ?—Can you meet me at the house at 5 ?”

"With pleasure."

They met on the steps, as the clocks were striking, punctual to a minute.

Leading the way into a small breakfast room adjoining the library :—"Do you know those?" asked Mr. Bennett, pointing to a set of eight water-color drawings, chastely framed, and hanging separate from the other pictures.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Warren, starting and turning pale as ashes—"Yes—that pair, in the middle there—of course I do—or I am dreaming—surely, my mother's 'Hard Lot,' and 'Happy Lot,' are they not?"

"Yes. And the other half dozen her's, too, every one of them."

The blood rushed back to Warren's face, and his heart beat so, he could not speak for a minute.

"Your mother little thought who was the one purchaser of her fruits of industry," smiled Mr. Bennett? "All I can tell you about it, is what I heard from Mr. Gerard Potter, for the Marquis never talked of what he did. It seems, he was struck with 'Hard Lot' and 'Happy Lot,' at one of

the Exhibitions, and told Potter to let him know, if he could, who the artist was. Potter did ; and he gave him *carte blanche* for as many, by the same hand, as he could bring him ; but his own name was never to be mentioned. That is all I know about it ; except that this slip of paper, found among his memorandums, written within a month of his death, Mrs. Mitchell says, makes you a present of them all,—“as the person”—you will see what it says—‘most likely to value and preserve them.’ Now I have done my part ; and, so, good bye, or I shall have Mrs. Bennett looking down her nose if I keep dinner waiting. And, yes, you can take them down, and away, as soon as ever you like. Men will load his name with reproach, now he is gone, and not wrong him much, may be, for some things ; but many a worse heart, my dear Mr. Woodford— you know we lawyers see something of both sides of human nature—many a worse heart beats under a fairer front, than, with all its sensuality, was the Marquis of Hardencore’s.”

Yes, all secrets were now out ; and Warren’s joy may be imagined, when, asking Sir Hiron and Lady King to step with him

into the next room, he showed them the prize he had just brought home, and heard their praises and congratulations. That was a proud day for Warren's heart! and might well make him think seriously for a moment or two; when, patting him on the back, Sir Hiron begged to be informed—“if he must surrender one, or the other, which of the two he would retain, to please himself,—the Ten Thousand, or the Pictures?”

“He must ask his mother about it,” smiled Warren; “and him, Sir Hiron, leave to run down with them to The Briers’ for a week, and then he would give an answer.”

The opening of the case at Rexbury, in full conclave, was a scene of itself worth painting. But the reader can sketch it well enough in his mind’s eye, if he will; and only begging him to remember, that Peter was by, and Aunt Barbara, too, who drew the cattle-piece over their heads, and was considered a first-rate judge! and that Lucretia was so overwhelmed with conflicting emotions as to be utterly incapable of knowing herself, far less of making known to any one, the exact nature of her feelings,—the case and its contents may be safely left

where they are; and Warren and his mother, the first transports over, to make dear Aunty's boudoir quite a little Cuyp and Gainsborough gallery before evening.

But Peter had been shamefully neglected all day, that must be owned ; "and now might he humbly beg to have a word with his old pupil as well as others ?"

There was reason in the request, and Lucretia "would try and spare him for just half an hour."

"Yes, you may well rejoice," exclaimed Peter, as, linking arm in arm, they paced the little shrubbery round and round in pleasant converse. "Did I not tell you there was grace in the act? And so there was great grace. It tells its own tale, and points its own moral ten times better than any sermon could do it. I don't know when I ever more felt what a *divine* gift conscience is, Warren, than I do this day. Oh, there is something so inspiring and confirming in good deeds, wrought through its means! They speak so home, too. Yes, you may well be glad! It is no little thing for heart like that, my dear Warren, which, I fear seldom acknowledged a joy

not one word more of Alice Harlowe. Whether Peter forgot all about her, or did not choose to remember, he knew best himself.

Warren was never in higher key, though he hardly mentioned her name once the whole evening. But he had his indemnification; for, before he closed his eyes that night in sleep, he had resolved on what he would do, and the resolution, his mother privately agreed with him next morning, did him infinite credit.

## CHAPTER X.

GIDEON TAKES COUNSEL'S OPINION, AND DETERMINES TO STRIKE WHILE THE IRON IS HOT.

THE good folks of Hillborough, with all their business-driving, were as greedy for the last news, and their dish of gossip over it, as the rest of the world. The question is, whether your busy little men and women of business do not open their eyes and prick up their ears at the *on dits* afloat quite as curiously as your idlers, who often talk more than they listen, but whose chatter, like monkeys', does no harm, except getting them often laughed at?

The news of Warren's good fortune, once set going by Christopher Griggs, ran the round as usual ; and even Aunt Betty lent a serious ear, and, like Archibald, 'humped,' and 'hail,' and arched her brows,

and pondered, and paid all attention, and more than once smiled, well-pleased, Gideon thought, while John Dorking, full of it, was recounting his praises, and telling of “the great man they predicted he would be some day, as great a man as Sir Hiron himself, and greater.”

‘Help those who will help themselves’ had ever been a Westminsterian canon.

It was evident, John’s business-like advocacy of the cause he had so much at heart had something to do with Aunt Betty’s frequent recurrence to the subject of the Hardencore legacy, and the reel and fly-rod, and the six hundred pounds, and last, but not least perhaps in sister Betty’s secret heart, the Lucretia pictures, which, in truth, had touched that cold, selfish organ, or, rather, piqued its pride, more than all the rest put together.

Who saw it clearer than Gideon? And, seeing what was to be done, that something must be done, and done quickly; or, once the tide turned against him, where would he be? On the rocks, a wreck. “No, by the blood of his mother that ran in him, would he ever be that? He would swing for it

he ran to talk it over with

her fingers at his long face  
say "only wished she was

ride in my carriage,"  
the wife of my choice be-  
sday six months, if I

they proved it; but in  
at thrice Gideon was  
his ear closer to quite  
; when, seemingly sa-  
from his seat, emptied  
dry and water before  
kissed the cheek held  
d, nodding assent, has-  
out the little carriage-  
veaving.

care, though, he was not  
the web himself—caught  
get out, if he wanted.  
for that, he, he, he !  
that over him, she

*and even with her  
d, like Archibald  
nd arched her b*

John Dorking was right when he said, "Gideon's game with Betty was a master-stroke." He had risen rapidly in her good graces, more so than anyone else had ever done before him. But though sure, so far, the ground he stood on was very ticklish. In a moment, change the wind of her caprices, and down he might go, never to rise again. As yet he had no hold upon her heart. A whim had raised him, and a whim might ruin. He must have a far firmer footing than that. She was old enough to be his grandmother, he, he, he ! But she was a woman, he, he, he ! And a vain old woman, too, he, he, he ! He had hit it—yes—he, he, he !"—and, straightway invoking\* the little god, Cupid got ready his sharpest arrows.

At the first shot, Betty laughed ; and, plucking the missing shaft out of the fold of her dress in which it had got stuck, tossed it back playfully into the face of the clumsy archer. The second was better aimed ; but, though not near the mark, showed an amount of skill she had never expected ; and, clapping her hands with the fun of it, she as good as told him to have

try—which he did. Herein, Betty act with her customary caution, led, for once, without her host; young ragamuffin, seeing it, let her utter astonishment, poor t was pierced to the very core. ty had enough work on her hat with new caps and skin- Caroline curls, well might all again! and Archibald shrug d Christopher stamp and n burst out laughing, to see e air with his fists, and one to powder; and Lady ly fan herself; and poor Sir to take it as coolly as if as Rothschild. It was t's true, to drive Griggs out l “what he went through,” ways declared, “turned his ve years before its time.” d visits that Betty now paid re very significant; and, if her countenance might be ex, certainly it said nothing, the barometer, about *set* and Lucy's eyes might

well dance for joy, when Gideon, after an interview with his young friend Jacob one day, ran in to show her something on a slip of paper, extremely interesting to them both ! which he, Jacob, “ would kiss the Bible on it, was an exact copy, word for word, of *her own* memorandum.”

One thing was clear to everybody, Gideon’s suit prospered. That Betty had any deeper motive than vanity, and the pleasure of playing off against Alice Harlowe by the power of her gold, in letting him make love to her, Archibald could not bring himself to believe. But when with his own pen he had that morning put him, Gideon Wolff down in his instructions for a new will, for the enormous sum he saw therein, there was a seriousness about it enough to stagger him ! and make him grasp friend Griggs by the arm, and regard him for a minute as he had seen him, Christopher, eye him, Archibald, before he got him on his day-book ; and, reading him to the back-bone, ask “ how it was all to end—unless—”

“ She will—I tell you she will—she must—she can’t help it,” muttered Griggs, in a sepulchral tone, and turning white round

the nose. " You mark—before this day six months"—and Griggs sunk his voice into a hoarse whisper—" I'll wager my professional reputation on it—she won't be here this day six months."

" Six months!" echoed Archibald, with a rueful smile, and locking up his drawers. " Hark, in your ear, friend Christopher—six weeks more, man, at this rate; and, let alone your's and mine—how about Josiah's little bill up at Lowdon?"

" The confounded old fool!" cried Griggs.

" Don't swear."

" It's enoug'n to try a saint."

" What?"

" Billing and cooing at her time of life—disgusting!"

" That all?"

" Enough, too—and clean us out by it of every sixpence."

" Wait a bit."

" How do you mean?"

" She's not gone yet."

" Not worth six months I tell you."

" She may alter her mind half a dozen times by then."

" If he's down, he's down. She mightn't

of her own which she had taken a fancy to, but was not most becoming; as, pinned round under her throat, it threw by contrast such a bloodless hue into the face, that Gideon started as he entered, so shocked was he at the visible alteration for the worse that only ten days illness had made in her. If Letty had had a little more time, she would have arranged her front hair rather more tidily; but, hearing his step on the stairs, Betty got impatient, and, so, merely drawing it back, just loose as it was, under her cap, her stern, hard-marked profile stood out in bold relief from the close broad frilling that circled her sallow cheeks.

Betty certainly could not be said to look to advantage that day. She had been seized with a violent fit of coughing just before Gideon came up, which had terribly shaken her, and exhausted her so, it was as much as she could do to get breath enough to make Letty understand, "she was to go and get her a cup of tea, but without any sugar or milk in it."

But what allowances will not love make for the loved one? And, rushing up to her bed-side, Gideon grasped the held-out hand,

s, there held it,  
n; till, unable  
nt, he let it fall,  
turned his face  
aving found his  
at least two  
his voice.

minutes that for  
, she would have  
her pocket than  
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uence, lay back  
it she would give  
I see him at that

ug herself on her  
vow in her heart,  
next day it should  
be to the only living  
and ever excited in it a  
?"

voe-stricken, on those  
sallow cheeks, what  
gh Gideon's brain?  
world will ever know,  
uessed at:—"What,  
should be wrong—

what if she got round and up again—and nephew Warren his foot in once more? Down for a million, was he not, Gideon Wolff, at that moment? Was Archibald Sharpe his friend? A stroke of the pen would cancel it all. Jacob said, ‘he kept it already dipped in the ink on purpose?’ They all hated him, he knew that—he, he, he!”—and now recovering his voice, Betty lay in a sort of sweet dream of delight, as he talked, and told her what his sufferings had been since she was taken ill, and what they would continue until she was quite well again. For the place was a barren desert without her, a sterile wilderness without fountain or flower, wretched and cheerless, where no home was, no home, at least, for him, no happiness! Oh, if she did not wish him to go mad with grief, she must make haste and get well and up again, or what good was the sun shining on them?”

If Betty wanted words, she had two eyes of her own, and, sunken though they were, what can escape a lover’s penetration? “Yes, yes, I know all that you would say. Your goodness to me—would that my power to return it as I could wish were equal to

my gratitude! You want no return, your kind smiles tell me, none but my faithful services. Have they not ever been yours since you saved me, a poor, friendless orphan, from starvation, when none other would hold out a hand to help me? How good, how generous, how noble of you! Yes, and won't they not always be yours, and yours alone, if you will have them, to the last moment of my days? Nay, nay—you must not speak—that kind smile is enough—you must not talk—see how it brings the cough on again.—There, won't you taste a black-currant lozenge I brought you from the chemist's? Yes, it will stop the tickling in the throat. And you can put the box under your pillow, and take one when you want? Ah, there's four striking. Now, then, I'll go and just finish what I've got to do at the wharf; and then I'll try and find you some nice sweet oranges at Biffins', and come up again and see how you are in the evening. Have you any commands for me up street?"

"Yes"—and the squeeze of the hand that accompanied it sent a thrill through the heart it spoke to, might well produce

that nervous grasp in return ;—“ yes, drop in on Archibald Sharpe, as you’re passing”—cough—cough—cough—“ and—and—tell him.”—cough—cough—“ tell him, to step up to-night”—cough—cough—cough—“ or to-morrow morning—and—and bring the papers with him.”

Gideon hung his head ; and sighing, with the relinquished hand still locked in his, raised his eyes from the counterpane on which they had fallen for a moment ; then merely replying, “ let Bibbs go,” seemed to implore to be spared an errand, for some reason, was pain to him even to think of.

“ How ?” gasped Betty, a dark cloud suddenly overcasting her face, and snatching her hand away ; “ what do you say ?”

Gideon stood motionless and mute.

“ Speak—are you dumb ?”

“ Let Bibbs go.”

“ I told you to go yourself.”

“ Tell me to go to the world’s end for you, and I will do it, but not there.”

“ I tell you go *there*—you will, or you won’t—which is it to be ?”

“ And what would they say of me if I did ? What are they always saying ? No,

no—ugly as I am, I have not ugly heart enough for that."

Was it a tear Betty now thought she saw come swimming in those devoted eyes.

"Humph—eh—what—say—they say—say that, do they?" she muttered, bringing her clenched fist down heavily on the quilt, "We'll see"—cough—cough—cough.—"Ha, ha—they say—do they—they? Ugly, too? Handsome is that handsome does—ha, ha! Gone time enough for the tea almost, hasn't she?" Four o'clock, and no kettle boiling yet, I'll be bound. Come to the workhouse this rate."

"I'll go and see about it," said Gideon. "You must be parched. Can you eat a bit of muffin if I run and get one?"

"May be," smiled Betty. "And then"—cough—cough—cough again—"then, tell Bibbs"—cough—cough—"to put on her bonnet—when, when she's cleaned herself—cough—cough—"and come up to me."

"How is she this afternoon, Mr. Gideon?" enquired John Dorking, presently afterwards at the wharf.

"Very poorly indeed! Mr. John."

"What does the doctor say?"

"Shakes his head, that's all."

"Enough, too. Then, there's danger," said John to himself; and taking pen and paper, he thought it his duty immediately to apprise Mr Warren of it.

John's letter this time was confined principally to the one all absorbing subject of Betty's illness. "He thought she was in a bad way. She might get better, and worse, for some time to come, but he knew Griggs had very little hopes of her. There was a peculiar puffy look of the face he had never seen in it before; and she was not near so captious and quarrelsome, which he took to be a bad sign; and her legs were so swollen, Letty said, it was quite shocking to see them. She moaned and mumbled a good deal in her sleep, and kept on talking principally about Timothy; and the workhouse; and sister Lucretia, and the pictures; and the old Marquis; and Gideon; and Archibald. She would sometimes sit up, and stare Letty in the face, without seeming to know her, for ten minutes at a time; and then call her to do her hair, and put her on a clean cap, and make her as smart as she could, before Gideon came up, or himself, or Christopher.

"It was astonishing, too, to hear her give her orders as usual about business every bit as rationally as he could. And Letty must tell her all about everything that went on ; and let her know what they were going to have for dinner every day, just as if they were combining to eat her up, house and home, in her illness.

"Gideon was still in high feather. She had made, they say, a new will. It was whispered too, that if she got up again, there were more unlikely things might happen than her becoming Mrs. Wolff. He, John, never would credit it till it happened. He knew it was a mad world we lived in, but that passed all bounds, and he would believe it only when his eyes saw it, and not before.

"The town was all a-stir ; and the old house besieged with kind enquiries from morn till night. Bibbs said, 'it was as much as she could do all day to answer the door.' Sir Bradley was there morning, noon, and night."

"John had nothing more to say at present; but would write again soon, if there was a change for the worse. What he most wished was, that it was all right with him, Mr. Warren ; then he should feel

much easier. But thank goodness ! he was as well off as he was. Still there was this to say—if he could have been *sure* of the precious little treasure up there, *before* anything happened, it would have been as well. Then, come what might, he would have been on the safe side ; for—excuse him, John, for repeating it so often—mothers were mothers; and ten thousand, though not to be sneezed at by any means, was not a million—at least, he imagined, Mrs. Harlowe would never count it so."

Nothing could be clearer than this. And, wishing to know his mother's opinion about it, too, Warren posted off John's letter, together with a few lines of his own ; that she might advise him, "as to whether he ought to run down to Hillborough, and talk it over with John, or not ? He should not decide one way or the other till he heard from her."

Before she had well read to the end of it, Lucretia had determined in her own heart what she herself ought to do, and would do, without another day's delay, if Aunt Barbara and Peter sanctioned it ; viz., let no personal feelings stand in the

way of what she considered was her duty, as a sister, and a Christian woman, now that poor Betty was on a sick bed, from which she might never rise again. She knew her own heart towards her—there was no enmity there, nor grain of selfishness. If she effected nothing else than a reconciliation between them, what a joy and comfort it would be to her! though she died, and left every shilling from them—to know that, before she closed her eyes for ever, all the past was forgiven and forgotten, and that they might hope to meet hereafter as kindred spirits ought.

“Am I selfish in this?” she asked Peter.

“Go,” he said, “and tarry not.”

“She can but drive me from her,” sobbed Lucretia, “come to the worst. But not until I have seen her face to face again, perhaps, it may be, but a little while before the world and all that it holds is shut out from her for ever. Then what would she give for one hour of the long years gone for ever? Yes, I will go, come what may. Do it I must—I feel I must. If I die for it, I will throw myself on her neck, and leave her my parting kiss of sisterly peace

and forgiveness, and my best blessing, such as it is, with it, though she should turn me from her doors the next moment."

"She will not—she cannot—it is not in the heart of Christian woman to do it," said Peter. "Yes, go, and God go with you. By to-morrow night you may be there if you make haste."

Before dawn next day Lucretia was hastening on her way to Hillborough.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE LITTLE MELODRAME OF THE MASK AND THE BLACK CAP.

LUCY GWIXNETT's wardrobe was limited. But she possessed, over and above her best Sunday turn-out, a smart black net cap, trimmed with red ribbons, which she wore of an evening sometimes on high days and holydays. How she got it was in this-wise. It had been Miss Westminster's lawful own once, and set great store by ; till, Timothy's death and money throwing her into mourning, Betty had need of a little comfortable copper tea-kettle to boil her a drop of water occasionally over her own fire ; and, seeing just the thing she wanted at Polly Quarles,' she made what Polly called " a swopp of it ;" and Lucy happening of all things to doat on a black-net cap and carnation rib-

bons, they tossed up, by Gideon's suggestion, 'whether she should give her mother half-a-crown or nothing for it ;' and, Lucy winning, Polly lost both her kettle and cap, and bore it, as Gideon allowed, with Spartan firmness.

It was not often that Lucy went to an evening party among her neighbours ; but, when she did, the carnation cap was a great card ! and the diluted articles it gave birth to in consequence, at last got to such a pitch, that returning disgusted from a soiree at her mother's, she tore it from her head, and, poking it into a drawer, swore—yes, swore, startled reader, as, we have heard, even Curzon Street ladies do sometimes as well as Cow Lane—swore, "there was no keeping anything stylish to oneself in this vulgar world—it was quite horrid!"

It might have been the knowledge of this, and of the small store Lucy now set on her toss-up, that impelled Gideon to do a thing, shortly after he left John Dorking, which, otherwise, bad as he was, he never could have been guilty of, viz., in Lucy's absence, to walk up into her room, unceremoniously pull open her drawer, take out the said

smart net-cap, thrust it, crushed into a heap, into the crown of his hat, and make off with it back again to his garret.

Theft could have had nothing to do with it : nor spite, for he rather admired it than otherwise ; nor jealousy, for it tickled his vanity to hear how they all copied her. Then what could it have been ? What of all things on earth could Gideon Wolff want with a black net-cap ?

Up in his room, and the door locked, Gideon soon showed what—First, he took the bolster to his bed ; and, having laid it out perpendicularly under the clothes, with a night-gown over it, and the arms, stuffed with a handkerchief, crossed over the breast, he punched up the end of it into a round head ; then clapped on the net-cap, and a mask which he had bought on purpose ; then bringing out rather a bolder beaked nose, and adding a dark line or two extra to the eyebrows with a burnt cork, he touched up the mouth and chin more into the Westminster shape , and there, sure enough lay Betty herself, or her *fac-simile*, as near as need to have been.

Artist-like, he stood for a minute en-

chanted with his own powers ! Then slipping into The Commodore's apartment, politely invited him to " step out, and come and have a chat with him, for he had something particular to communicate ;"—and, leading the way, " requested his serious attention to what he was going to explain to him."

Cripple was all attention.

" Mind then"—and, springing on the bed, with one knee on its stomach, and grasping its throat with both hands—" see —see," said Gideon, tightening his hold, and vengefully pressing with his whole weight on the poor bolster—" so—so"—and the lesson seemingly made easy :—  
" Now then," he cried, leaping to his feet, and snatching up a stick, and punching up the head again into shape—" now, then—quick!"—and following suit in right earnest—" good, good !" cheered Gideon, throwing his arm round his pupil's neck, and putting a cake into his hand, for joy ;—" do as well as that, darling old dear ! when 'ems wanted, and 'em shall have a whole cocoa-nut, with the milk in, to 'emself, shan't 'em, Jockey ?"

Practice makes perfect. By next night

the pupil knew his lesson better than his master.

And now came out some faint foreshadowings of what the black-net cap was for—to have a rehearsal or two, prior to a little melodramatic performance that Gideon had in his mind's eye, wherewith to take Betty by surprise some night, come a chance, and nothing else would do for her.

" And now, then, he would go down, and see how she was, poor dear old soul ! and give her a suck of orange."

Betty, exhausted with coughing, had taken an anodyne draught and fallen off into a doze. Letty was sitting sewing at a round wainscot table at the bed foot, by the light of a single candle, whose feeble flickerings, as the draughts from the door and window swept across her, but that she had clever eyes, were just enough, and barely that sometimes, to guide the thread straight through the needle's head. It was a freezing cold night, and, the better to keep out the cutting wind that howled down the chimney, she sat wrapped up to the neck in a large, old Angola shawl, with John's horse-rug over her knees, to keep her feet warm ;

every now and then casting a wistful glance at the door, as a footfall in the passage reminded her of John's heavy, honest, tread ; then at the sparkless old pot-bellied grate ; and fancying " what a famous fire she would set roaring in it, if she were mistress."

A good blaze would have been an improvement, without doubt ; but, anyhow, it was a comfortless room, that dark, dull, dry-rot-smelling old bed-room of Miss Westminster's. At times, when the south wind came from the river, it was stiffling to enter it. Nor had the upholsterer done anything to help them. Look where you would, the dismal spirit of decayed memories alone stared at you at every turn. That was why Betty treasured it above all the other apartments in the house—look where she would, the only objects she saw in it were the cherished memories of her dearest associations, not one of which would she have exchanged for the possession of Aladin's lamp.

Modern patterns, what were they to Betty ? She had slept, one terribly stormy night, at Lowdon, in their state-bed. Oh ; the joy with which she gazed again next

day on the old spindle-shanked chairs and oak-posters, was what she never should forget ! They were identical with every memory she held most sacred on earth. The recollections of two centuries were still green as yesterday upon them. They had never been out of the family of the Westminsters. What more was needed to preserve their freshness to eternity ?

Large and lofty enough in all conscience was Betty's bedstead that she was lying ill at ease on ; so disproportionately large for the room, that, as you entered, you could see nothing else but it and the fire-place ; till, getting where Letty sat, a clumsy, top-heavy, black-oak press gloomed at you in one corner ; balanced, in the other, by a ricketty chest of worm-eaten wainscot drawers, with great brass handles ; and which, with a high, straight-backed, black-horse-hair-bottomed chair or two, a small square wash-stand, and the table Letty was working at, and a hand-glass hung on a nail over the chimney-piece, comprised the furniture in the sleeping apartment of, then, the richest spinster in all England. Of carpet, of any description, there was none ;

nor were there any curtains to the windows. There might have been once, for there was a plaited valance to each, of the same material and colour, a snuff brown moreen, as the narrow slips to the bed-head ; which now shook so with the wind ; that Bibbs had tucked the one on Betty's side tight in that it might not wake her.

Letty raised her eyes, then dropped them again on her needle, as, stealing softly in, Gideon, gave a glance at the sleeper ; and, sinking into a chair, planted his elbows on his knees, and his two cheeks in his open palms, and, without uttering a word, sat with his ferret gaze fixed on the counterpane.

Letty felt the blood curdle colder within her at sight of him. She knew not why, but she thought he had never looked so hideously hateful as on that day. There was a peculiar half sneaking, half saucy manner, about him, with a savage glare of the eye, when he thought he was not observed, that made her shudder whenever she met him. He seemed like an evil spirit always in their path, to be dogging their steps wherever they turned, and from which there was no

escape. John had had the same impressions, too, of late, but attributed a great deal of his insolence to the power he knew he had over Betty ; and the certainty—for he, John, supposed it was certain—that at her death, he could snap his fingers at them all. “ What wanted he there then, with his cringing, crafty smiles, at that late hour ? ”

A low muttering from the sick-pillow broke dolefully in on Letty’s thoughts ; and, laying down her work, she went to the bed side, to see if Betty wanted anything. No, she was still sleeping. And, returning to her seat, she resumed her needle ; while Gideon, hitching his chair nearer, sat like a statue, so motionless, that for a while a mouse might have been heard running over the floor ; and Letty, her flesh creeping, could hear the thumps of her own heart, it beat so at the solemn feelings that came over her.

Again the muttering recalled her to herself.

“ What ? ” asked Gideon, as, throwing out an arm from under the clothes, Betty called him by his name.

"Where—where is he?" she muttered—"Archibald—where's Archibald?"

"Coming, as he told you, to-morrow morning," answered Letty, soothingly.

"Coming—coming—don't come—shall come—shall—shall."

"He will to-morrow, be sure."

"Mine, is'nt it—mine—who's else?—He shall—I will;"—and she lulled down again for half a minute.

A deep sigh broke from Gideon's breast.

"Workhouse—go to the workhouse—not a penny—not a penny—go—go—let her go.—Ten thousand—Tim didn't—Tim wouldn't—not a penny—go—let her go.—Archibald—where's Archibald—Gideon—take the name of Westminster—not Wolff—Westminster—where—where?"

Letty leant over, and tried to turn her, for an easier position, on her side.

"Where—where?" she asked sharply; and, struggling to raise herself up, she wokc—stared wildly round her—caught Gideon's eyes fixed anxiously on her face; and, extending to him her hand, leant her head back on Letty's shoulder, his gaze still riveted on her.

For more than five minutes Betty thus remained, without word or motion ; when, dropping off again into a deep doze, Letty laid her down for the night. And, it being now supper time, Gideon wished good night. And Bibbs having brought her up a slice of bread and cheese and a mug of beer and another candle—she lingered a moment or two on the stair-head to shake hands with John, after their usual fashion when they could get a chance. Then, nothing more remaining to be done but to prepare for the stern task of duty that was before her till daylight, she, first, bolted the door safe ; then, falling on her knees, sought the comfort she most wanted where alone it was to be found ; and, rising a deal happier for the trust, ate her bread and cheese and drank her beer with thankfulness ; and heaping on all the wraps she was mistress of ; and snuffing the candle, sat down again to her needle, and her night's watch—scarcely, for the first six hours, feeling the bitter cold at all.

## CHAPTER XIII.

BETTY SIGNS GIDEON'S FATE, AND SEALS  
HER OWN.

AFTER a night's sound sleep, Betty woke, to the surprise of them all, so much better, apparently, that she could sit up, and take her cup of bread and milk, and talk a little with Letty and Bibbs, as composedly as ever she did in her life.

Christopher Griggs shook his head dubiously down stairs at John's cheering report. John was a clever fellow at many things, but John had not Christopher's experience in these matters. "It was so with nature very often. There was a lull with her, an interval frequently, just to give time to take breath for the last struggle, nothing more. If that were the best news he had got for him, he wouldn't give a farthing for it; and,

having gone up, and come down again :—  
“ Just what I told you,” said he, hopping into his gig. “ If Archibald has got anything to do, he had better make haste, that’s all, about it. I’ll drop in, and tell him so.”

Archibald Sharpe was breaking the shell of his second egg, when Griggs’s round ruddy face, with anything but the grave in it, broke in on the pleasant process.

‘ Better to-day, eh ?’ mumbled Archibald, his mouth full of hot toast.

“ Worse.”

“ The deuce !” and, quick ! presto ! fly ! scooping out the last spoonful, up jumped Archibald, and, seizing his hat with a bundle of papers in it, off he ran, and was at the sick bed-side in less than ten minutes.

At the first glance, Archibald saw how the case stood—that he was not there that morning for talk only ; but to listen, and do as he was told, and what he had to do, to do quickly. There was that in Betty’s look and manner—and no one knew her better than Archibald Sharpe—which said plainly as words could have expressed it,—“ I am mistress here—I have no time to waste—make haste—obey orders—that’s

enough for you :”—and, so judging, he drew a paper from his pocket-book, and, handing it to her :—“ This is your own list,” said he ; “ perhaps you had better read it over first.”

“ Read it to me.”

On went name after name, without word or gesture ; till, coming to Gideon Wolff :—“ Stop,” said Betty—“ how’s that ?—Six hundred thousand ?—I said ten hundred, didn’t I ?”

“ You said something about it, I remember ; but I did not understand that—”

“ Didn’t you ? Then you do now ;” and on came a violent fit of coughing ;—during which Archibald, spreading a folio-sheet of foolscap out before him on the table, made the entry as desired.

The spasms over :—“ Go on,” gasped Betty.

So Archibald did to the end, uninterrupted ; when, taking courage from a satisfied smile she gave him in return :—“ You were saying something yesterday, I think, about your nephew, Mr. Warren Woodford,” he ventured, drawing his chair a little nearer, and looking at her appealingly ;

"something, if I remember right, about that little—how much was it—that you had it in kind contemplation to do for him, by his uncle Timothy's wish on his death-bed, if his conduct merited it, one of these days?"

"If!—deserves it, don't he?" muttered Betty, turning crimson, then pale as a corpse, and picking at the bed-clothes.

"I think sincerely he was heartily sorry for that hasty act."

"Sorry—sorry—yes—so was his mother—but she did it, didn't she?"

"Yes, and has paid the penalty—and a pretty heavy one!"

Pick—pick—pick—pick.

"Been punished enough, if ever woman was."

"Ten, wasn't it—ten thousand he got?"

"From the Marquis?—Yes."

"And six—six hundred—to put him out?"

"A noble and righteous act that, too."

Pick—pick—pick.

"He robbed him of his father."

"Mighty loss that—not a penny but his pay."

"I am sure your own good, kind heart thinks and feels so as much as anybody's."

Pick—pick—pick.

"Anyhow, we must forget and forgive in this life, must we not?"

Pick—pick—cough—cough—cough.

"Never troubled his mother for a shilling that, I know."

Pick—pick—pick.

"Never caused her a moment's sorrow in his life."

"More than—than"—cough—cough—"she can say for herself."

"We must forget and forgive, as we hope to be forgiven."

Pick—pick—pick—pick; but quicker and quicker, and with such a heaving of the chest and hurried breathing, that, Archibald, fearing she was dying—as a sudden livid paleness overspread her face, and one arm seemed to fall useless at her side—took at the bell; which bringing up John and Letty, off Bibbs went for the doctor; and soon the whole town, though the ice was six inches thick, was in a state of fever-heat.

But Christopher Griggs knew his business; and, clearing the room of all but Archibald,

Letty, and himself,—the flagging pulse by degrees came back ; and, “ though what the faculty called *paralysis hemiplegica*, partial paralysis of one side, had taken place ; there might be insensibility of parts, and loss of motion, without immediate danger to any vital organ ; and when, she had taken the composing draught he had ordered her, she might last—days—weeks—months possibly ; heaven only knew how long.”

“ How long do you think, *entre nous*, she really will ?” whispered Archibald, on the stairs-top.

“ If eight and forty hours more, friend Sharpe,” confided Griggs, grasping hands — “ it’s as much as she will. Have you anything more to do—best do it.”

There was some meaning in that plain talk, which Archibald could understand ; and again drawing close to the bed side, he waited till Letty had given her patient a cup of tea ; then, taking a hand in both his, “ shall we complete now ?” he asked affectionately ; “ or would you rather get some sleep first, and then I could run in again in the evening ?”

“ Evening—after sun down—do business,

that way—of evenings?" muttered Betty,  
that hold?—know better."

"To-morrow, then?"

"To day—now—now."

Archibald rang the bell.

"Go," he said, to Bibbs, "and tell my  
two clerks, Mr. Rates and Mr. Whitmore,  
to step in instantly."

In less than ten minutes those two very  
professional-looking gentleman made their  
appearance. And, all ready:—"About your  
nephew?" repeated Archibald, dipping a  
pen in the ink, and drawing an obstinate  
hair away from the nib-point.

Betty's jaw fell; and, clutching the  
sheet with her right hand, while the other  
lay powerless beside her, she stared round  
the room as if in search of some object she  
was thinking of; but, not finding it, a deep  
sigh escaped her; and sinking back on  
Letty's breast,—yes, tears came rolling  
down her face; and, when Letty had wiped  
them away, the ink in the lawyer's pen was  
dry.

Archibald took another dip.

"Don't deserve a farthing," she mumbled.

"Not a pin—a pin—to choose—'twixt

mistress and monkey," and the blood re-filled the veins of her neck and temples almost to bursting.

"He never said it," exclaimed Letty.

"Never! I'll wager my life on it," echoed Archibald.

"He didn't?"—didn't say it—who did—who—who?" gasped Betty.

Archibald shrugged his shoulders.

There was a dead silence of a minute or more, during which Betty lay back motionless, with her eyes fixed vacantly on the poor palsied hand beside her.

Archibald, though an attorney, was not the man to lose a chance to serve a friend, though it put nothing in his own pocket.

"I'll stake my life on it, he never said it," he repeated.

Betty looked up at him as he spoke, as if hardly conscious of what he said; then, seeming to recollect:—"Eh—well—must think of it," she mumbled.

"Let by-gones be by-gones,"—entreated Archibald. Forget and forgive. "Best say what it's to be now, and have done with it—then you'll get such a nice sweet sleep."

"To morrow. Sign—sign now."

Archibald saw the time for talking was over ; and, nodding to his clerks, again filled his pen with ink ; and laying the papers out before her — Elizabeth Westminster, of Hillborough, did the deed ;—and, safe and sure enough, Gideon Wolff, of the same was down for a million, sterling.

“ Well done, well done ! gentle Gideon.” exclaimed that overjoyed individual, as, after another little melodramatic rehearsal, he with his friend Cripple crept to their cribs that night, and laid their heads in amity on their pillows; “ well done, good Gideon ! Now take thy rest, and fear nothing. Now let nephew Warren’s shadow but cross thy path, to trip thee up ; and, if thou can’t not find a way to take the wall of it—go, he, he, he, he, he ! and write thyself an ass, sweet master Gideon.”

## CHAPTER XII.

### SPECULATIONS.

THE excitement in Hillborough and about, when it became known that Betty Westminster had had a paralytic stroke, and was not expected to live many days, was fifty-fold greater than when brother Timothy lay on his death bed. Then it was pretty well a known thing before hand, who would be sure to come in for the bulk of his wealth. Now it was very different. The next heir was disinherited ; Warren Woodford had irreconcilably offended his Aunt ; and, though Gideon Wolff, by all account, stood high on the list, Betty's capricious temper was well known, and there was no saying, whether at the last moment she might not send for her lawyer, and

cancelling all she had done, in a freak leave every farthing to charity, if Mr. Plover got hold of her, which was not impossible.

"It was not likely she would bequeath anything to her half-sister Lucretia," said the gossips, "though she ought to do so, in honor of brother Andrew's memory, and it might weigh on her conscience to keep faith with him. Lucretia's chance, at all events, was not worth much. The worst of it would be, if the annuity dropped with her, which most likely it would, if Gideon was down for the enormous amount they said. John Dorking was certain of a good round sum. And Letty Gordon ought to be also, for, poor thing! she had earned it, if ever wretched slave richly deserved the fruits of incessant labour. How Mr. Plover would come off there was no telling. True, he had never troubled her much with his little subscriptions; and Florence had always filled her pots with mince-meat at Xmas, and invariably consulted her on the new patterns for the school girls' caps and cloaks. Still, Betty and the Vicar never got on quite well together. She had been heard to say:—'He always put her in mind of

her coffin, he looked so gloomy, just as if all the world were going wrong but himself. And he was so bland and buttery, it was quite jolly to hear John rap out one of his bluff broadsides after him. He seemed, too, always to be treading on eggs. And what, in pity's name, did he hold his ten fingers always apart so far when he came into a room? Was it to show there was nothing naughty hidden anywhere about him? Till she saw him do it, she had never suspected anything of the kind.' As for Sir Bradley—a bad job for him, come a blank! No fear about Christopher Griggs, he was all right. Leave alone Archibald Sharpe, too, for feathering his own nest. And Josiah Till; and Bibbs—they needn't be afraid. Nor need Tobias Blunt, the coal man, have been, but for that sixpence over. Forget and forgive that ever, spite of the ducks, would she?"

Altogether, there was food for considerable speculation! and Archibald's face, as he went about, was watched for with an amount of anxiety and interest, must have been very flattering to his feelings, or very fulsome.

Oh, gold, gold ! alas, what hast thou to answer for ? Thy debt to truth and justice is very great. The mangiest hound, stretched on his death-straw, had he but enough of thee to give, would have no lack of sorrowing hearts thronging round his scurvy kennel ; while the noblest soul that poverty ever left to rot in a garret—there might rot ; and, when its time came, ask in vain for so much as six feet of oak-plank, the last boon—unless the parish found that it *must* afford it.

The fever spread like wildfire. And when it transpired that Betty had signed a new Codicil only that morning, the state of the old town was something unprecedented even in the memories of the oldest stagers.

Christopher Griggs had enough to do. How he ever managed to answer, as he did, all the questions put to him, and get through his other business, was a marvel to everybody ! and yet that very Mr. Everybody was way-laying him at all corners. But Christopher Griggs had a knack of his own, somehow, of being pleasant to all alike, unddoing his work well, too ; and that was how he beat all his opponents

hollow ! quite as much as by his other testimonials ; " though they," Mrs. Griggs would tell her friends in whispers sometimes, " filled one of her little trunks up stairs quite full." And there was the more merit in it, for Christopher, once a pupil of Abernethy, as well as of Sir Astley, might have had some show for grunting and gruffing it over them, as his professional rival, Chowler Braggs, did. But not he. And, so—not a cottage forgotten, and with a smile, go where he would—the ground he went over that day might well nettle Braggs, and set his assistance Mr. Squirk, contemptuously turning up his nose as he rattled past him. Yes, Christopher had enough on his hands in all conscience ; and though no one appeared a bit the wiser for anything he told them, he seemingly satisfied them all, which was the great art that Braggs, with all his boasting, could never attain to.

Archibald adopted his own plan, when they stopped him—humped his back, and ha-ha'd, and humped—and shrugged his great shoulders, and snorted—and, so, cutting it short, remarked, " how very cold it was," and was off.

Nobody ever thought of such a thing as gossiping with John Dorking during business hours.

Betty Gordon, too, had too much to do a great deal, to think of anything but her duties ; and Griggs—who knew something of a sick room—“ must say, those she *did* fulfil like a true friend and Christian woman.”

As to Gideon, he seldom opened his lips at any time, except to “ he, he, he.” But now, those over for the present, he slipped about with a blank face and bent gait; till, forgetting himself for a moment, he seemed on the point of a giggle as usual, and as if he longed to run up and fetch Cripple and have a game at leap-frog with him ; then, checking himself, if any of them looked at him, to be on the brink of a flood of tears; “ but, all the same, or John was mistaken, there was a saucy, triumphant laugh underneath, only biding its time till it could out, and, snapping its fingers in their faces, bid them defiance.”

Bibbs went about disconsolate, as old servants do when the master or mistress is going, hardly daring to hear her own foot fall, and looking so forlorn, that Mr. Plover got

her by himself in the back parlour ;— and, satisfying her—“ That death was common to all, and that, in truth, it was the gate of life to good people, and, as such, was to be rejoiced at, rather than feared, by those who, like her careful and provident mistress, had, by their uniform abstemious life, laid up the brimful measure, it was to be hoped, for themselves, millions of times more precious than all their millions here,”—poor Bibbs was comforted, “ and felt she could now look twenty deaths in the face, when they came, without a shudder.”

Linked arm in arm, Sir Bradley Bellshaw and the Rev'd Blandon Plover had a word or two to say to each other on their way homeward.

“ A sad loss to us all ?” sighed the Vicar.

“ A great comfort she appears so calm and collected ?” condoled Sir Bradley.

“ Indeed yes. If I could only prevail on her to let me read to her a little, I think it would be such a support to her !”

“ Do you think she believes she is as bad as she is ?”

“ She signed a new codicil to her will yesterday.”

" Griggs gives no hope."

" Poor soul !"

" Ah, true—when it comes to that, poor indeed the richest of us!"

" It is to be hoped she has made a wise and just disposal."

" Between ourselves"—and Sir Bradley turned a little pale as he said it"—" I am afraid there will be many more disappointed than pleased in Hillborough?"

" How will it be, do you think, about her nephew?"

" Not a shilling."

" Really?"

" Got himself alone to blame for it."

" How sad!"

" Never would listen to reason."

" And his mother?".

" Not a sixpence either."

" Great pity!"

" Yes, if the annuity drop."

" What will she do?"

" Heaven knows. There's her son rising rapidly, that's a comfort. They say he'll be a rich man some day."

" It'll be a blow for her?"

" The Ten Thousand came in just in the nick of time, didn't it?"

"Most fortunately!"

"Lucky fellow, by George! that Gideon Wolff. A million they say."

"Is it possible?"

"Fact! And residuary legatee, too, I'll bet a hundred."

"Nearly a million and a quarter isn't there?"

"Yes, quite, if not more. And then—there's Letty Gordon; and John Dorking; and—who knows—she's as capricious as the weather-cock—at the last moment—likely enough—she may do something, I shouldn't wonder, for Warren, or his mother?" And Archibald Sharpe—of course there's a snug slice for him. And Griggs, I hope to goodness he's all right, for he works like a horse. And—if merit is to have its due—a round sum for mother church, eh?—let alone our highly esteemed and valued friends, up yonder there, just under its wing — its brightest ornaments."

"And—if merit is to carry it—no less a sum in accordance, I trust," smiled Blandon Plover, stopping short to go and speak to one of his flock, "for"—

"Yes, yes," laughed Sir Bradley, grasping

hands — “*if—if—nous verrons*” — and, skipping over the way into Josiah Till’s, it was pretty evident how much doubt the gallant Baronet had in his own mind about it by what followed.

Josiah had just parted from Christopher Griggs, and was looking up into heaven at his door as Sir Bradley entered

“ Sharpish to day, Till? What news?”

Josiah went into the back room adjoining his shop; and returning with a large cardboard box in his hand, took out a magnificent sable-furred Lyons-velvet cloak, and, displaying it with sparkling eyes :—“ That’s what I want Lady Bellshaw to see before any one else,” said he.

Sir Bradley eyed it carelessly.

“ It wont be here many days.”

“ Not a bad style.”

“ Sumptuous! The *fac simile* from the Duchess of Eiderdown’s. Not such another in the county.”

“ Good quality?” asked the Baronet, examining the pile with his eye-glass.

“ Last for ever—that’s the worst of it.”

“ Short rather, for a cloak, is it not?”

“ Not in the least. Rather longer than

usual—the last mode.” “How much—to an old friend?”

Josiah bowed low; and, thinking a bit:—“to pay me anything, it oughn’t to be a farthing less, Sir Bradley, than—let me see—less,—with such skins as those—warranted real—none of their minxes—match them if you can between this and London—not a farthing less than—say thirty six guineas, and that’s a bargain!”

Sir Bradley gave a little whistle; and, kissing his hand to some one in the street, asked for two pair more of the buckskin gloves like the last.”

Josiah rolled them up into a little parcel; and, lowering his voice:—“I will say pounds to you,” he whispered.

“And if you do, how the deuce do you suppose I am ever to pay it?”

Josiah smiled.—“I may take my chance of that, if I will, may I not?”

“What do you think our good Vicar *will* have it, Till?”

“And not far out, either, I’m thinking, Sir Bradley,” nodded Josiah.

“I say—there’ll be some looking down their noses before long, Till?”

They walked to the door together.

The Vicar was in earnest talk with Archibald Sharpe some distance up street.

"How much for friend Plover's chance, eh, Josiah?"

"They never hit it very well together did they?"

"You know what she once said to Lady Bellshaw, when somebody was telling her how divinely he preached," smiled Sir Bradley:—"Hold your rubbish! None of your divines for me—give me a human mortal—some sense in that."

Josiah tittered.

"Ah, there's the doctor, by Jove! Just the man I want—wonder how she is now—poor thing!—sharp weather this for her—eh—ah—what?"

"No harm in sending up the cloak for her Ladyship to look at?"

"Not a bit of it. Won't promise, though, she'll like it, mind."

"If not, her Ladyship can return it."

"Yes, yes—thank'ee, thank'ee;" and, hastening after Griggs:—"By George!" said the Baronet to himself, "a pity rather! I didn't take him while he was in the humour.

—there's a simpleton!—and give her that sable muff to match, and the new dinner-dress she was speaking of. How stupid of me! Won't do now, though. 'Gad, if the old girl's going—I only wish she'd make haste about it. Aunt Harriett, heaven bless her! don't mean to pop off yet, I know. That's the worst, confound it! of those thin, wiry, nothing but skin and bone old ladies, they do last so confounded long."

Oh! what a world it is—to be talking, and writing *my dear friend*, and *your's very sincerely*, as folks do every hour.

Some way up street the Rev'd Blandon Plover still stood in close confab with lawyer Sharpe.

Observing Sir Bradley cross the road, in pursuit of the doctor:—"Getting younger every day, isn't he?" smiled Archibald.

"In excellent spirits indeed!"

"Buoyant as a cork—won't sink."

"Astonishing!"

"Dance on the surface till he's dead."

"Alive and light enough, eh, this morning?"

"Humph!"

"Up about something, eh?"

" What?"

" Oh, if you don't know, who does?"

" Humph!"

" Ah!"

" Oh?"

" Eh?"

" Ah?"

" Exceedingly kind-hearted people!"

" Got in all the Xmas subscriptions?"

" Eh?—which?—ah!—what?"

" Bother it, there's Tubbins!—nothing to do all day but eat and drink, and talk, if you'll let him, and tap his toe with his stick—no, I'm hanged if he shall this morning!—good bye—poor Griggs—look—he's in for it:"—and humming to himself—

" Caroline, Caroline, there's music in that name of thine."

Off darted Archibald like a shot down River Street, pointing with the roll of papers in his hand to Cow Lane, the corner of which the vicar had just contrived to clear; when vanishing through some doorway, up came Mr. Tobias Tubbins; but, though nicely foiled, Tobias, nothing daunted, turned on his heel, and, spying Griggs's foot on his gig-step, made for him

with all speed ; and would have caught him to a certainty, if Sir Bradley, whispering something, Christopher had not jumped in just at the moment he did, and, touching Snowball with the crop of the whip, got away down Market Street in tip-top style.

To indemnify himself, Tubbins, fond of bijouterie, turned for a good look into Sam Bright, the jeweller's window ; and, seeing something that took his fancy, walked in—spent an hour over the ring-cushion and guard chains ; thought he would have his own neck-chain re-gilt ; purchased a little eighteenpenny bunch of lacquered charms ; told Mrs. B. to put him by, till next quarter, a Geneva jewelled watch, the size of a shilling, that played beautiful little tunes ;—and, then, all down and up High Street empty as if he were the “last man,” Tubbins strolled home to gaze at his charms, and arrange them in his waistcoat button-hole,—and wonder if Betty had left him anything, and think “what a devillish lucky fellow he was not to have to work for his living.”

And now, as the day waned, and came the last bulletin ‘ that Miss Westminster was not

so well again, and complained of more pain in the chest, and shorter breathing,'—curious and impatient faces might be seen conferring eagerly together at every turn, with eyes wide open, and ears greedily swallowing every *on dit* as it was borne on the wind, mixed strong, or diluted, from the sick-room.

Best part of A MILLION AND A QUARTER  
was about to change hands !!!

Was not that enough, in all conscience,  
to open folks eyes and ears ?

## CHAPTER XIV.

BETTY'S LAST CHANCE OF HEAVEN IS SAVED.

BUT all this time where was Lucretia?

When she reached Ross, she found, to her great grief, that "The Defiance" had left nearly an hour, its way-bill having been accelerated by sixty minutes during the winter. But there would be the night-coach up about six; and by that, if she got a place, which was a great chance, she might go on, and get to Hillborough next morning.

There was no help for it; and, passing the day as she best could, at last 'The High-flyer' came in. It was full in and out, and so heavily loaded, that, "had it been to put five guineas in his pocket," the guard de-

clared, “ they couldn’t allow another band-box on, to serve nobody.”

Here was a sad blow! What was to be done? She could have a post-chaise on, if she liked, in less than ten minutes; but what a sum that would cost all the way! And, on looking again at Warren and John Dorking’s letters, though very ill, Betty was not seemingly in such immediate danger as to justify her incurring so great an expense, if it might be avoided. Moreover, she shrank rather from encountering a long, cold, dark-night ride, all alone, like that would be; and, hearing the old coach roll off, made up her mind to stay where she was; “ that perhaps it was all for the best; and, whether or no, there was no help for it; and it was as well to think so, and not fret herself about it; but have her tea when she had written to Warren, and go to bed, and be up in good time next morning.”

What an excellent character is punctuality! In nothing more did “ The Defiance” defy the malice of its worst enemies than on this point—when was it ever known in Hillborough to be five minutes behind its time?

The town-clocks had not struck six three minutes, when Dick Acre's " See The Conquering Hero Comes," freezing-cold as it was, brought them blowing their fingers and stamping their toes all round him, as though they had not seen his jolly old nose for a fortnight; and, now face to face, though parted but since that time yesterday, it was a pleasant sight to note the greetings and good fellowship, in which John Bull stood out in bold relief as well, may be, as in any honest picture could be drawn of him. Those pictures have been painted for the last time ; but, still, many who have them on their walls, look at them with a kindly sigh sometimes ; not for the eight miles an hour, including stoppages, &c., &c. ; but, for certain other old cherished associations, that, alas ! went the way of all flesh, too, when poor old Dick, broken-hearted, they say, was carried his last journey—" May the dust lie lightly on him."

There was little fear of Lucretia being recognized now in Hillborough, even had she not taken the precaution before alighting of covering her person as much as possible

in a long loose cloak, and her features by dropping her veil.

Her sensations as she stood on the old spot, not a feature of which seemed to have undergone a change, for all the years that had separated them, may be easily conceived. But she dared not give way to them then. Her success on the mission she had come must not be endangered by a thought of self, by a thought but for the one grand object of her presence there—to gain admittance to an angered sister's sick-bed side, and her forgiveness of the past, and the kiss of peace exchanged before the last opportunity was lost to them for ever. On any other errand, oh! how she would have rejoiced, free and fearless, to have hailed with open heart and arms all the too deeply cherished memories came greeting her like dear old welcoming friends at every turn. But, circumstanced as she then was, it never would have done to have given the key-note to any one in Hillborough of her arrival; or, be sure, if it had reached Betty, she would have ordered the doors to have been shut against her, and all her tears and entreaties would have availed her nothing.

Was there a mercenary motive in Lucretia's breast in thus acting ? For herself not the shadow of one. If a hope, a rightful hope, too, of the mother's heart for her child lay at the bottom of it, who will blame her, can anyone call that selfishness ? Her conscience was not void of offence, in having married against her father's will as she had done. She had paid a heavy penalty for it ; but she had brought that on herself, and perhaps might not have suffered so much had she had less pride, or taken more pains to conquer it. Now that Betty was most likely on her death-bed, clearly every sense of duty and affection required nothing less of her than to offer the right-hand, of sisterly reconciliation and forgiveness ; and then, come what might, she should prove to her she harboured no resentments ; and, though Betty's end might be none the happier for that, well she knew her own last moments would be, which was what she had chiefly to look to for her own peace.

And, so, hiring a porter to carry her trunk after her, Lucretia walked with palpitating heart to "The Plough," a second-rate inn, where she was sure not to be

known ; and, requesting to have a private room, and some tea ;—while it was preparing, wrote and dispatched a few lines to Mr. John Dorking, with an earnest hope, “ that he could come immediately, and advise with her as to how she had best act.”

John was raising his own first cup to his lips when the note was brought him ; and, dashing it down untasted, and seizing his hat,—in less than five minutes, almost wild with joy, and panting for breath, honest John was shaking hands, and no mistake, unless he was dreaming, with the person of all others in the world he most wished to see at that moment, the sweet mother of Warren Woodford ;—and the gush of mingled emotions that for a minute deprived John of his voice, must be taken as a far better evidence of the state of his feelings than all the flowers of language could express them.

All that was wanting to make the group complete was Warren’s presence. Still, it was a perfect little picture of its sort, as it was, to those interested in it ; and never in his life had John sat for his likeness, without

knowing it, and looked so thoroughly handsome, to our fancy.

"And now, first, about my poor dear sister? Is there no hope?" asked Lucretia, with heaving breast and eyes brimful.

"None," answered John, seeing he had to deal with one with whom simple, straightforward truths must be spoken; and forthwith in a few words he gave her such account as he could of how matters stood; and she was in possession of it all just as fully as if they had sat over their cup of tea and toast, talking and bewailing about it for two hours.

"I am very thankful I am here!" said Lucretia;—and then she confided to him the resolution she had formed, on receipt of his letter and Warren's, with Peter and Aunt Barbara's sanction, to take the journey, and endeavour to see Betty before she died, and not let her go out of the world at enmity with her, if she could help it. And now how would you advise me to act about it for the best?"

Lueretia was talking to a heart, rough grained as it might seem at times, as good, and guileless, and gentle, and generous as her own; and where two such hearts meet

in counsel, they quickly understand each other.

There were some difficulties in the case of course; but none but what John felt sure might be overcome with a little clever care and management.

"You must leave your trunk where it is for the present, said he;" pay your bill now, and come with me. Zounds! who has so much right to walk into her own sister's house as you have? Very well, then—first you must see Letty, she will help us if any one can; but the main point is to take Betty at the proper moment—no use unless—all depends on that; then, directly a chance offers, Letty will let you know; and then, go your own way to work, none other so good, and trust to God—He will never desert his own."

"What, if the sudden shock of seeing me should—should kill her? hesitated Lucretia, every drop of blood forsaking her face; "I should never forgive myself."

"It will not—no fear of that—I can't think so," said John, impressively. "But if it did, better it should than that she should go to the grave without giving her a

chance, which that would be, of heaven hereafter, which all the money-heaps haven't been enough to buy for her yet, I'm fearing."

"Poor dear Betty!" sighed Lucretia.

"Yes," continued John; "give her that chance, and a blessed chance it may be! Only let Letty mind and go the right way with her about it—and she will bless you for it with her last breath—I feel sure of it as that I'm living;"—and, eager for action, John would listen to no more doubts or scruples; but, taking upon himself the management of it all with Letty, so as to keep Gideon as much in the dark as possible; in less than another quarter of an hour Lucretia was safely sitting, with one hand of Letty's clasped in hers, giving her overcharged heart full and free vent in the little back parlour of the old home, the very same, not a feature changed, as when she last saw it, now more than twenty years past, even to the old hassock that Betty's pet black cat with the red leather collar used to lie rolled up on beside the fender, and the two black profiles of the sisters over the side-board, looking, as the artist's heart

evidently intended, as if they loved each other dearly !

John's delight was only equalled by Letty's ; though, had she told him as much, he would have stared,—for as to crediting that any one's heart could be crowing to itself as loud as his was that evening, it would have been absurd to suppose John would have believed any such thing.

But "now she must run up to the sick-room for a little while, to let Bibbs come down and do what she had to do." Betty had been asleep since 4 o'clock ; and if she woke up better, then would be their chance, and leave Letty alone for making the most of it. And John had to go and see to some business matters, and posting of letters, which would detain him about an hour; and then would rejoin them, and be ready to lend a helping hand in any way he could be useful. "One thing Mrs. Woodford must mind -- should Gideon return from The Hermitage, where he had gone with a message, and get sight of her, she was to meet him as a stranger, on a visit to Letty, but be sure not to let him know whoshe was."

And now left alone, Lucretia, gazing

round her with swimming eyes, tried to realize her position. There was little doubt as to where she was; yet, though every object that met her gaze had *home* stamped so deep on it—that there was her father sitting still in his old leather arm chair by the fire side, with his short, straight, grizzled hair, and pent-house brow, the same bent bony figure, playing with his fingers in his lap, as when she last saw him the night before she kissed his cheek and pressed his hand for the last time,—never she felt so far off what her heart had always associated with the thought of home, as at that moment. Yes, though there was the identical Daddy's-chair, standing, as if untouched since that night, just in the same place by the rug-end facing the window; and the little oblong mahogany table at its elbow, on which Betty used to put him his tumbler of weak whiskey and water of an evening, and, on Sundays, the ponderous old Bible he read from,—her heart saw no home smiles in them welcoming *her* back to their arms. She felt an alien in her father's house. Nothing seemed to recognize her.



saved her heart from quite bursting ; for it told of things, and thoughts, and doings, as of yesterday, in which came sweetest responses to her ; and, smiling through her tears, ‘ she fancied she saw Warren there present before her, as he had often drawn her a picture of it, and Betty in Daddy’s old place, and poor, patient, uncomplaining Letty at the bottom, bearing her burden with a martyr’s fortitude ;’ — and joy once more filled her soul, to think that she was where she was ; and, again turning to the spot over the mantle-piece where the sweet face of her angelic mother used to be—where was it now ?—a sense of fresh peace took possession of her breast, which, she felt, had nerved her, as it were by inspiration, sufficiently, come what might, for the further trial that was in store for her.

But a little scene, in connexion, was passing outside just at this moment within a hundred yards, which it is convenient that the reader should here be made acquainted with.

It so happened, when Gideon arrived at “ The Hermitage,” full of the last bulletin, that Mrs. Harlowe had but five minutes

She tried to court a loving smile, but was met by a cold stare of unconcern. In the midst of old faces, she might as well have been an exile among the tombs. The very death-like familiarity of all about her sent a chill, as of the cemetery, through her soul *In memoriam*, and saddest memory, too, gloomed on her mournfully at every turn : —and, the sense of loneliness becoming intolerable, she hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

Her bosom all the lighter for it, she again looked round for a smile somewhere ; and became aware of a new face present which she had never seen till then. It stood alone and apart from the rest, and harmonized with nothing else, not even with itself, but seemed quite strange, and out of place, and awkward, and unhappy. It was a coarse-grained, common-made oval dining table, of a light wainscot-wood, and larger by one half than the little narrow black mahogany double flap affair that Daddy used to sit at the top of over his kidney-dumpling. Alien there, like herself, as it was, there was a look, nevertheless, that spoke of life and hope to her in it, and

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shoulder :—“ recommended him to mind his own business, and take to his heels and get home again before his mother found he was out, if he didn’t want that laid about his back ;” whereupon, off Jacob scampered as fast as his legs would carry him ; when, thinking for a moment, Gideon Wolff turned on his heel, crossed to the other side of the street, dived down Cow Lane, took the second to the right into River Street, and, slipping up to the bar of the “ Plough,” asked “ for the lady in the black cloak, who came in by “ The Defiance” that evening.”

The lady had taken tea, and afterwards left with Mr. Dorking.

“ How long ago ?”

“ About an hour.”

He thought it must be the same lady they had been expecting. He was passing ; and, hearing that the porter had taken her to “ The Plough,” dropped in just to ask.

The lady’s trunk was in the parlour, till she sent for it.

“ Ah, indeed ?” and, following Matilda, — yes, there, sure enough, was a hair-trunk in one corner, with L. W. in brass nails on it, and, on a card tied to the handle, *pas-*

*senger from Ross.* “ Yes—thank you—I thought so—thank you ;” and, hurrying off, Matilda returned to her post, and thought no more of it.

“ L. W.—Passenger from Ross,” muttered Gideon to himself, as he quickened his pace almost to a run homeward ;—“ he, he, he ! —Ross—Ross—R stands for Roxbury, too, don’t it ?—he, he, he ! ” and slipping through the back way into the scullery, from which he could get a peep into the kitchen adjoining without being perceived, and there being no signs of Bibbs or Peggy about, he stole softly along the passage, and, making sure the coast was clear, put his ear to the parlour key-hole ; and, not a sound within, gently opened the door, looked in, drew back again quick as lightning, and, listening for an instant, sprung up three stairs at a bound ; and, reaching the first landing, backed into a closet, as he heard Bibb’s footsteps overhead ; there waited till she had passed down, and then, creeping out, got into his own room safe and snug the next minute.

Time was precious ; and straightway stepping into his friend Cripple’s closet, and

dragging him out after him, *nolens, volens*, and catching up a stout knotted stick, Gideon lugged him headlong on to the landing, and, pushing him on his haunches, squatted down beside him with fixed jaw and eyes glaring like a tiger about to spring upon his prey—having made certain that Letty would go down presently to her black cloaked friend in the parlour, and so give him the one last and only chance his vengeance panted for.

But Betty, lulled off by Christopher's anodynes, little dreamed how she was keeping her devoted admirer shivering in the cold for her, or she never would have had the heart to continue, sleeping and snoring so, as she did, for another hour.

At length, a heavy rumbling waggon going by, she opened her eyes ; and, staring about her confused, asked for some drink, and where Gideon was ?

Letty held the barley-water to her lips ; and “had no doubt Gideon would be in very soon now, and up to see her.”

“Where’s he gone ?”

“To the Hermitage.”

A dark cloud came over Betty’s troubled

brow, and her hand shook so, the cup would have fallen from her fingers, had not Letty caught it.

"Won't you take something now to eat?" she asked her. "A little broth? I have made some fresh to day; or some of the port-wine jelly Lady Bellshaw sent you, warmed with a rusk soaked in it?—you must try and take something, if it's ever so little."

"Cup of tea," mumbled Betty—"hot—hot—and bit of muffin—tell Gideon—bit of muffin;"—and then, pointing to the drawers—"my net-cap—under the lace-collar there;"—which Letty having put on, after arranging her front hair a little;—"now I will run down and see about your tea," she said, "and send Bibbs up; I shall not be gone many minutes."

"Bit of muffin, mind, tell Gideon."

Letty nodded; and, leaving the door ajar, as Archibald, in his fright, had pulled the bell-rope down when he tore at it:—"Thank goodness!" she said to herself, as she hastened to do her bidding, "she seems happier to-night a great deal. Now, if Gideon don't come in and spoil it all, before another ten minutes she shall have that

chance, as John says, of heaven given her ; and, with Him for our help, and I feel He will help us, what need we fear ?”

The deepest tragedies, though years have been spent in their plotting and concoction, depend often on but a moment for their perpetration. One stab—the pull of a trigger—a few grains, or potent drops, administered—or the single Thugean hug, will suffice to do it in an instant.

Scarcely could Letty have had time to run into the parlour “ and let Lucretia know how Betty was—and that she had first to go and get her a cup of tea, and then would be the chance for them to take her while her heart was open,”—when, Cripple at his heels, Gideon Wolff stood at the sick-room door. Cautiously listening for a moment or two, his mind seemed to be made up ; and, stepping noiselessly into the room, and slipping the cord by which he held him off The Commodore’s neck :—“ Quick,” said he, pricking him deep with something sharp in his hand ; when, catching Betty’s cold, hollow gaze fixed on him, as if staggered at his sudden presence, he stopped but for an instant to see Cripple take a leap on the

bed ; and then gaining the street door unobserved, passed out without any eye, but One, seeing him ; and, with speed enough to prove an *alibi* if wanted, was by Lucy Gwinnett's side—almost by magic comforting himself with a glass of grog, and leaving The Commodore to shift for himself, as he best could, in his absence.

Hearing the street-door opened, and shut, Lucretia thought it was John Dorking had returned ; and going into the passage to meet him :—" Hark—merciful God !—what was that ?—Miss Gordon—Miss Gordon !" and, tearing up stairs, from whence the cries came mingled with groans and moaning growing gradually fainter and fainter, and thinking only that Betty was dying, and that she would be too late,—she rushed into her room—and, oh, misery ! what a sight met her horrified gaze !

Cripple had all but done his work. Squatted on poor Betty's stomach, one paw was on her throat, squeezing it with all its might, while with the other he was beating her about the head and face, and tearing the hair out of her temples by the roots. Struggles, even if she had had the strength

for them, what good were they? for cries or groans, or moans, what cared Cripple then? "Had he no wrongs, too, in his memory, to be atoned for? no moans, and groans unnumbered, then present to his thoughts, which had never been heard by any? Oh! yes, his time had come now. It was but paying off old scores, paying them with interest. The tortures he had suffered for their pastimes—were they to go for nothing? The dreadful beatings he got, when, do all he could, nothing was enough for them? Those burning-hot tin-plates, too, for her amusement—how grateful he ought to be? And the floggings and fastings out of number he had kept the score of—had he forgotten one of them? No, no—there was the score they had run up—the day of payment was come—paid he must and would be. No, they would not pay, if they could help it—but they should—they should—they should!" and the moans grew fainter and fainter; and, but for the sudden entrance of the Angel-hand sent to arrest it, the last vengeful blow had been dealt, and Betty Westminster had wiped off with her blood all scores with her merciless creditor.

John ever after declared, "The hand of Providence was in it—to give her the one chance of heaven that alone was left her;" and Letty, although she did not openly say as much, believed it, too, in her heart as much as John did.

Doubtless, Lucretia's providential arrival saved Betty's life that night, and afforded her yet time to make what reparation she could, before she died, for the cruel wrongs she had done her injured sister, wrongs far greater than any one knew of but herself.

Scared from his murderous purpose, for a moment or two it seemed doubtful whether, in his rage and disappointment, the hideous beast would not, quitting his victim, turn upon her, Lucretia; but, appearing to think better of it, he let go his hold of the throat down which streamed the blood from her mouth and nostrils, and, leaping to the floor, grinning and gnashing his teeth, ran, bedaubing the way with his crimson paws, headlong out of the room; and swinging himself over the balusters, as he caught the sound of footsteps below, got somehow safe to the bottom, and, making for the back-

yard, found a present refuge from his pursuers in the wood-house.

Betty, thus miraculously rescued at the last gasp, turned her fainting gaze on her preserver. It was but a moment's bewildered half-conscious look of recognition ; for, the next, she was insensible—gone—gone so seemingly for ever, that Lucretia, with a piercing shriek that brought Letty, quickly followed by Bibbs, and then by John Dorking, to her, thinking she was dead, fell upon her neck ; and clasping her in her arms, with a cry of genuine grief and misery went to every heart,—“ Elizabeth—Elizabeth,” she called, as to one who could not answer her ; “ oh my poor sister—my poor, unhappy sister !” and, straining her to her bosom, cried over her like a child.

John had run off for Griggs. He was not at home ; “ he was down street,” they said, “ somewhere.” On John ran from house to house ; while Bibbs, more fortunate, seeing him coming out of Josiah Till’s, seized him by the arm, too excited for utterance ; and pulling him along—there they were at the bed side, when John came back with Mr. Moss, his assistant, at his heels.

"No, she was not dead. She still breathed. She would come to again presently ; but for how long, he, Christopher, would not say. The nerves had received a great shock. The room had better be cleared of all but Mrs. Woodford and himself. He would remain till she revived ; and then leave them alone together, and go down and wait a little in the parlour, in case they wanted him."

For more than an hour Betty lay almost pulseless, and perfectly unconscious of what was passing around her ; when, waking as from a deep trance, she gazed vacantly into Chistopher's face, as if she did not know him ; then seeming suddenly to recollect herself, uttered an exclamation of dread, and glancing terrified first on one side, then on the other, closed her eyes, as if to shut out something that made her shudder.

"Speak to her," said Griggs.

Lucretia leant over the bed-side, and kissing her cheek :—"Elizabeth dearest, do you know me ?" she asked.

"No—yes—yes—no," answered the wandering stare in return.

"Yes, yes, you do"—pressing the poor

nervous hand tenderly between both hers—“you know Lucretia, your own sister Lucretia, don’t you?”

Again the confused brain seemed trying to shake off some image that haunted it.

“Not know Lucretia”—yes, I am sure you do,” soothingly put in Christopher. “sister Lucretia, who saved you just now from”—

Griggs had touched the chord he sought.

A film seemed to fall from Betty’s eyes, which, now filled with tears, no longer vacantly wandered from object to object; but seeing only the sweet face that was smiling on her, full of true love and tenderness found a safe resting place and refuge whereon to anchor themselves; and, making an effort as if she entreated her to come closer to her, Lucretia again threw her arms round her neck; and their lips in close embrace “putting the seal to the contract,” as Christopher expressed it—off he ran down stairs with the glad tidings! and the joy in the little parlour that night was what Bibbs, with all her experience, “had never seen or heard of since she had known it!”

As for Griggs:—“he had been present at many a death-bed scene in his life, enough

to melt a heart of stone ; but he could say with truth, he had never witnessed anything that affected him so much—he could have blubbered once if he had given way, he told Mrs. Griggs—as that death-bed meeting of the two sisters."

It was not what they said or did, for but few words passed between them ; and little more of what the heart was full of met the eye, than an occassional loving look, or convulsive grasp of the hand might vouch for. But quite enough was both said and done—if Christopher was any judge—to satisfy him of one thing, viz., that Lucretia Woodford was an angel, no doubt of that. And if his skill, which had never been questioned, did not suffice to keep sister Betty alive, till she had done the right thing, with friend Archibald's help, and so entitled herself to that place in heaven which John talked of—why, the sooner he shut the shop, and gave Chowler Braggs, poor fellow ! a chance, the better "

But Hillborough was not to be thrown into mourning on that score. And Lucretia, as she sat with Betty's hand clasped in hers that night, and heard from her own

lips the confession of an act, which, above all her other acts of cruelty and injustice towards her, had weighed heaviest on her, Betty's conscience since brother Andrew's death, viz. the heartless interception and destruction of his, Andrew's last letter to her, Lucretia, signifying his wish to see her and Warren at Reddington immediately ; and her seeming contempt for which had robbed them of what he meant to do for them ; and, furthermore, when --the kiss of forgiveness and peace given, and returned—she heard her call her “sister, dear sister ;” and, coupling her name with “Warren, her good nephew s,” implore a blessing on them in one and the same breath,—she felt sure both that her mission was fulfilled; and falling on her knees as soon as Betty had sunk to sleep, poured out all her soul to Him, in whose hands they were — servants, one and all alike, to do His will, for good or evil, as seemed best to His wisdom and mercy.

But the night's dark work was not yet over. Satan had been foiled by an Angel sent against him, but not beaten ; and, was, even then, close at hand, only waiting for a fitter prey, to join him shortly

up stairs, he trusted, in “the chamber of horrors,” as good a name as any for it; where the reader can follow him, if he, or she feel so inclined, in the next chapter, which, not particularly liking, such sort of chambers myself, I promise shall be a short one.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE "CHAMBER OF HORRORS."

HARDLY had Christopher Griggs left Archibald Sharpe's door on his way home with the joyful intelligence of the reconciliation of the sisters which he had just witnessed ; when Gideon, slipping in the back way, and hearing from Bibbs how matters stood, and that "Mrs. Woodford and Letty were then sitting, with a hand a-piece, on Betty's bedside "the best of friends imaginable ;" and that Cripple—"who must have got loose somehow, and owed her a terrible grudge, to have attacked her as he had done"—had escaped, and was nowhere to be found,—lighted a horn-lantern which he took from a nail in the corner ; and, setting off full speed for Lowdon, begged permission to search for

the runaway in his favourite haunts round about, where he had sometimes taken shelter before when inclined for a little privacy.

No, he was not there; and terrible was the consternation in every face at the tragical story Gideon brought them of his murderous assault on his poor mistress! ‘Where could the ungrateful miscreant have gone?’ And retracing his steps, full of fury and indignation, a sudden thought seemed to strike Mr. Wolff as he passed through the back-yard. “He, he, he!”—and thrusting the kitchen poker into the fire, while Bibbs was busy clearing away the supper, he waited, looking intently on the flames, till it was red-hot; then, snatching it out, proceeded with it straightway to the woodhouse; and plunging it deep into a hole in the wall behind a heap of bavins and rubbish :—

“Ah, devils! I thought so,” cried he, with a fiendish smile, as a dismal yell of pain and terror disclosed the whereabouts of the fugitive.—“Come along, then, will you?” with a second plunge:—“Damnation! do you think I’m going to stand jabbering here, with you any longer?”—and, groaning with

rage and despair out crawled the poor beast, and, crouching at his tyrant's feet, lay at his mercy, to batter his brains out, if he would, and so put an end to his woes for ever.

No—no such clemency as that, he might depend on it. No there was a little fresh torture first to go through ;—and, slipping a rope over his head, and giving it a tight pull—Cripple saw that his master was in no mood for further parley just then, and that he was required to come with him up stairs, and must do it.

There once more, all safe and sure, and the door locked, Gideon Wolff stood motionless for twenty seconds, with the poker still in his grasp, seeming to be regaling himself on the helpless wretchedness of his victim, and to be making up his mind what he should do with him—the miserable creature, evidently aware of what was in his thoughts, though prostrate at his feet, narrowly watching every movement.

There was a mutual close scrutiny for more than another half minute—Gideon sitting down on the bed-foot for a balk, but never once removing his eyes from his subtle

friend ; when suddenly—a hope seeming to flash across him—Cripple made a bound towards his closet-door.

“ Ah ! you would, would you ?” and, with a spring intercepting him, a sharp blow on the neck told him plainly, “ that sort of game was of no use ; ” when, limping into the furthest corner, and seeing no escape, he uttered not even a moan, but, showing his teeth from ear to ear, and planting himself firm against the wall, said as plainly as could be :—“ I’ll fight for it—now then.”

“ You will—will you ?—devils !”—and, swinging it round, down came the poker—not on the scull aimed at, for that, with the cunning and agility of its tribe, bobbed out of the way of the blow, but only to batter in the worm-eaten old board on which it fell.

Cripple saw his chance, and with a vengeful leap lighting on his tormentor’s shoulder, before he could recover his balance, by main force dragged him down on his back, and, falling over him, there was a desperate struggle which should get uppermost. Cripple settled it, by wrenching himself free with the strength of his hind legs ; then, squatting with his whole weight on his chest

—for he was nearly as big as a baboon—he made a grasp at his throat, pinned him to the floor, and squeezing it with all his might, Gideon felt himself choking, and for a moment or two a hideous death laughingly staring at and mocking him ; when, Cripple relaxing his gripe a little, Gideon got an arm free—plucked the open-bladed knife that he always carried, from his pocket—shook its sheath off—and running its lancet-point deep into his shoulder ;—with a sharp, shrill cry, Cripple let go his hold, bounded towards his closet, and, rushing at it with all his power, burst the doo ropen, crept into his den ; and, there the fight ending, seemed quite disposed, if Mr. Wolff so pleased, to cry quits, and leave the settlement for another time.

A little rest was indispensable for master as for monkey ; and, tossing the bloody knife on the ground, Gideon threw himself on the bed exhausted ; so much so, that, yielding to the stupor that came over him, he soon forgot all about his mangled throat, and fell into a deep sleep.

Not so Cripple. Sleep came not to soothe his sorrows. His wound pained him sorely. And how many more were in store for him

on the morrow ? There was not a dry spot where he could lie—for his own blood—and by whose hand shed?—“ Ah—hark—his tormentor slept — hark—yes—slept soundly. Oh, would it were the sleep of death to him. To-morrow—to-morrow :” — and creeping from his bloody straw, he peeped cautiously through a crevice before advancing further.

Gideon lay extended on his back, with his mouth open, his arms thrown out wide, and snoring heavily. He looked horrible. Lividly pale and ghastly, as the flickering light of the candle in its socket, leaping up by fits and starts, played on his hideous features. There was little fear of his waking, though the anxious care Cripple took not to disturb him, as he stealthily crawled into the room, showed he had his fears, and for what a life or death stake he was playing.

Ah ! what was it, as he crept onward towards the bed-side, though he shivered as he snatched it up, overjoyed him so ?

Little dreamt Gideon Wolff, when he spent an hour over the purchase of that knife, what a bargain, to please Betty, he had driven. He had often looked at it, and

laughed with her at the thought of the six-pence he had saved by it.

Where was it now? What a use to come to! In Cripple's paw—and wet with his own blood. Well the poor beast might shudder. But every moment was an age—“to-morrow—to-morrow:”—and grasping the handle firm, he got to within arm's length—plunged the blade up to the hilt in the tyrant's throat—grinned at what he had done—ran to the passage-door—tried it, but it would not yield—bounded back into his closet—with a desperate wrench forced the window open—looked out on the starry heavens—chuckled at the sight—ran an eye over the ground lay dark, but open, before him—took the spring—gained the parapet—gazed giddy around him,—and, off for his life, scrambled from roof to roof—and wall to wall;—till, landed at last, and not a soul astir, he paused to take breath, and think for a moment—and, resolved, made for the woods—was lost:—and soon over the eastern hills out burst the glorious harbinger of joy to millions besides the worthy folks of Hillborough and Rexbury! as if

the world it came to bless had only hearts in it to smile upon and true as good as Lucretia's and Warren's.

But Betty's one chance of heaven was saved. And sweet, and unvisited by any but happiest visions, were the slumbers of the Angel heart that had been the permitted means to win it for her. Well might the sun shine out so gloriously!

"One such good deed done as that," as John said, "was enough to atone for a thousand bad ones!"

## CHAPTER XVI.

'TIS A LONG LANE THAT HAS NO TURNING.

THE first question Betty asked Letty Gordon, when she opened her eyes after a long and deep sleep, was—"where is my sister?" The next, after being told that she was safe and happy in bed in her own old room—"when is Warren coming?"

"John wrote to him last night," replied Letty; which, drawing a faint smile :—"what o'clock is it?" she enquired.

"Not yet six. Have a cup of tea now ; and then try and get another hour or two's sleep before breakfast."

"Nice—nice," she said, emptying the cup and looking up pleasantly at Letty. "In her own room is she?—Bibbs—put—put a bit of fire."

"We wanted, but she wouldn't have it."

"Wouldn't—Bibbs wouldn't?"

"No, no—not Bibbs—Mrs. Woodford."

"Cold—cold"—and, staring round her, Betty shivered so, Letty made her lie down again; and covering her over with another shawl,—“there now,” she said, “that’s more comfortable isn’t it? How glad Mrs. Woodford will be to find you have had such a good night.”

“And mind—mind.”

“About the fire?—yes, yes.”

“No—mind—mind—Archibald’s here—Archibald Sharpe—and Bates—and—and—where’s?”

But the shivering coming on again, Letty reminded her, what Christopher Griggs had enjoined about her talking too much; and, heaping on all the wraps she could lay hands on; and promising that Archibald should be round as soon as he had his breakfast,—Betty turned on her side; and in a few minutes fell off again—muttering something about “Andrew—and Timothy—more than a million—more—more—more”—into a tranquil doze

Letty was not likely to forget about Archibald Sharp. And John, undertaking to see

that no time was lost, went himself; and “bagging him,” as he called it, on the stair foot in his dressing gown and slippers,—before the clocks had struck eight, Archibald was cracking his egg, safe enough, with Mrs. Woodford on one side of him, and Letty on the other, down stairs in the back-parlour; Mr. Mansfield Bates and Mr. Whitmore, his highly respectable clerks, on either elbow of John Dorking, playing a very creditable knife and fork over the broiled ham opposite—specially provided for the occasion from a store somewhere in a back cupboard, that John knew of, in the little white-stuccoed house over the way with the green door and brass knocker; and which sent such a savour through the house, that well Bibbs might sniff, and, thinking of poor Miss Betty up above, “wonder whatever she would say, if it reached her.”

To John’s question—“where was Gideon, that they had not seen him since tea-time yesterday?” Bibbs knew as little as himself.

She “thought he had taken supper somewhere out last night, and let himself in, and gone to bed late, for she had not seen him after he left to look for Cripple. Very

likely he did not go bed till long after they did, and was not up yet; or, for what she knew, might, as there was company, have risen early, and gone off to breakfast at Lowdon or The Herimtage. If so, he would lock his door after him, as he always did, and take the key with him ; she'd step up and see presently."

Either way, John was perfectly satisfied. Betty had not asked for him once, Letty said. " And for his, John's part, his non-appearance at the breakfast-table that morning raised him considerably in his estimation, for it was the first sign of modesty he had ever known in him. He could easily understand his not, as things had turned out, particularly relishing a *tête à tête* with two such tender truthful blue eyes as Lucretia Woodford's. He should not care himself to encounter them face to face, if he could not do so without blushing.

Breakfast was hardly over, when Bibbs, who had been on the watch while Letty was away, ran down to say, " her mistress was awake, and wanted her. She seemed a great deal calmer, and talked quite rational.

like, but not near so strong as yesterday. Perhaps Mr. Sharpe would step up, too, as she had asked for him."

That Archibald would do; and following Letty;—"Yes, come in, she nodded, after having whispered a word in Betty's ear; and motioning him to draw a chair closer to her—Betty, as well as the want of breath would let her, made her last wishes known to her lawyer, with as much force and distinctness, considering her rapidly sinking strength, as ever she did in her life. She had evidently determined it all in her mind what she meant to do. And now Archibald, having it all down in his, too, no less clearly, returned to the parlour; there with Mr. Bates's assistance to do what was better still—have it all down without delay in black and white:—which done, he made short work of the rest. And, having satisfied himself and his witnesses, that what Miss Elizabeth Westminster, spinster, of Hillborough in that County, was about to do, she did with her own entire knowledge and approval; being in full possession of her senses the while,—obtained her signature thereto;

and fervently pressing her hand, “wished God might bless her for it;” and, putting his papers into his blue-bag, “had nearly” he told Griggs, going out, “as big a load removed from his breast that morning as Betty had.”

“Yes, as Betty had.”

“God be thanked!” she ejaculated, looking with glistening eyes at Letty, as Archibald’s broad shoulders disappeared through the doorway;—“where is dear Lucretia?” and sinking back exhausted on the pillows that propped her up, wept aloud.

Though Archibald grasped both Lucretia’s hands, bidding good bye, in a manner looked very significant from one so cautious and crusty as he was; from no word or sign that he gave her had she any more knowledge of how Betty had been disposing of her money than Letty had. “Time would show that soon enough,” thought Archibald to himself; and his manner even to Griggs, in the passage, was so mysterious, that, had he been any other than his dear old friend Archibald Sharpe, Christopher “could have found it in his heart to sit him down, he looked so sly and provoking!”

Betty was in no case then to examine motives ; but, had she been, the purely loving and affectionate kisses, that with both arms round her neck, Lucretia now met hers with, as soon as the room was cleared and she might let free her heart, would have amply repaid her for all the wealth she could have given for them ! Holy, most holy, and happy beyond all that Betty's happiest dreams had ever conceived was in store for her, was the heart and soul union cemented by that sweet embrace.

And the last sands were fast running out. And the few remaining hours—how did Betty Westminster employ them ?

Mr. Plover “ grieved deeply, that all his exhortations to be admitted to read and pray with her were unavailing.”

“ I will try what I can do with her,” promised Lucretia.

It was a delicate task to undertake.

But Betty lay and listened attentively to all she had to say.

“ Do let me read to you,” entreated Lucretia.

The fixed eyes left the palsied hand on which they were intent, and looking upward,

RECORDED BY [REDACTED]  
ON [REDACTED] 19[REDACTED]  
AT [REDACTED] HOURS  
IN THE [REDACTED] STATE  
OF [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

"No, it was John. Be sure he will be here very soon now. Quick or he will be too late."

Bibbs had been up to Gideon's door, but, finding it locked, concluded he had risen early, and, not choosing to join their breakfast party, gone most likely either to Lowdon or The Hermitage. But when one, o'clock came and dinner with it, and still no signs of him, Bibbs began to fidget; a little and communicating her surprise to Miss Gordon, Letty began also inclined to think it rather strange.

As they were talking about it, a footman from Lady Bellshaw called to inquire, "how Miss Westminster was?"

"Had they seen Mr. Wolff there that morning?" asked Bibbs.

"No, not since yesterday night when he came to look for The Commodore.

"Did Mr. Robert think he was at "The Hermitage?"

Mr. Robert, "had only just been there, with a present of potted turtle-soup and guava jelly from his Lady to Mrs. Harlowe, and had heard nothing of him."

"It was very strange!"

"Perhaps he had slipped in the back-way,"

said John. “and gone to his room without any one seeing him. He would go up and see.”

John did, and tried the door, but no one answered. So, not doubting but that he had his own reasons for privacy just then, and would re-appear again quite soon enough for any hurry he was in about it; they sat down to dinner, — agreeing with Bibbs, “that she could put him by a plateful in the oven, in case he came in famished as usual, and not in a social humour.”

Hardly had Letty helped all round, when in ran Bibbs, pale as a sheet, to say, “Jacob Quarles had just come to tell them, ‘somebody had seen a large monkey, the image of Cripple, in the marsh-mead, early that morning, scampering away as fast as he could towards Hulme-wood; and that there was the lattice-window of his closet, looking over into Wool Street, all broken to pieces—they could see it, plain as possible, if they looked from the corner, just past Tobias Blunt’s.’”

“No!”—and John laid down his knife and fork; and so did Christopher Griggs, who had been prevailed on to stay and take a mouthful

with them ; and staring at each other :— Bibbs “ was certain as she lived that something dreadful had happened !”

“ Why ?” asked Griggs, absently.

“ Why, because there was a winding sheet last night in the candle,” faltered Bibbs, faintly ; “ and I couldn’t get a wink of sleep, try ever so, for Tobia’s great yard-dog howling so.”

“ Conclusive,” cried Griggs ; and, emptying his ale-glass :—“ Come along,” said he, to John ; and, arrived at the garret stair top, they stopped to listen for a moment.

All was still—not a breath to be heard.

“ Does he usually lock his door when he is out ?” asked Christopher.

“ Always almost,” whispered Bibbs, holding by the baluster, ready for a precipitate retreat in case of peril.

“ Odd ?” said Grigge, turning the handle.

“ Yes, isn’t it ?” agreed John.

“ Hark !” and knocking again, and again, but to no avail :—“ hollo ! what’s that ?” exclaimed Griggs, stooping to look at something near his foot ; and, putting his finger on it—“ goo ! Heavens ! it’s blood ?” he

poker — the disordered condition of the whole room—the blood-marks on the floor, separate from the pool on the landing discovered by the doctor—the smashed closet-window — the miserable animal's evident escape thereby—his bloody paw-prints on the frames, and all along the parapets, and over the house-tops, and up here, and down there, till lost in the Marsh-mead :—“ but one conclusion could be come to—and that was, that Gideon Wolff had been killed, in the way seen, by the monkey they called Cripple—probably in revenge for the cruelties he suffered from him ; and that, as soon as he could be found it was, the opinion of the jewry, he should at once be shot.”

But, to return to the death-bed of the millionaire—Betty Westminster was dying fast. In another hour what would all her treasured wealth be worth to her ?

Warren had arrived. The meeting between the Aunt and Nephew drew tears from them all.

It unmanned Christopher so, he was obliged to leave the room.

Archibald “ would wait in the parlour till it was over. Such scenes always brought

be, that he is a great antiquary, and, the old house being full of curiosities, will not, as he does not reside in it himself, have a thing touched ; but, in consideration of the drawbacks attached to it, lets it, for half its value, to an old miser lady, more miserly if anything than Betty herself, they say, who sometimes makes a pretty penny from the lovers of the horrible, by showing them the Gideon-chamber.

But enough of such chambers of horror. They are not for healthy minds. So, best seek to know as little as possible about them ; and ask only for mercy for the terrible crimes they tell of.

If the Hillborough pulse was at fever-height before, it may be imagined how it beat when the fate of Gideon Wolff transpired that afternoon.

Verily—for with that we have most to do now—The House of Wealth presented a dismal scene ! It cost the coroner and jury some trouble to come to their verdict. But from the evidence on the face of it—viz., the fight, by all appearance, that had taken place between the monkey and his master—the board battered in with the



The sun shone pleasantly through the venetian blind into the back-parlour, as Mr. Archibald Sharpe, laying a packet of papers, which he took out of a blue bag at his feet, on the table, drew his chair a little closer, and, looking round him affectionately, proceeded without further delay to the main business that had brought him there that morning.

In the room were Mr. Warren Woodford, Sir Bradley Bellshaw, the Rev. Mr. Plover, Mr. John Dorking, Mr. Christopher Griggs, and Mr. Josiah Till.

Lucretia Woodford and Letty Gordon were sitting by a good fire in the drawing-room, talking of a hundred things most interesting to themselves, and which the reader, so inclined, may easily anticipate ; so leaving them to their own sweet converse and soul communings, we will recross the passage, and return at once to the little back-parlour.

Mr. Archibald Sharpe had a clear, strong, and musical voice enough when he chose to let it be heard ; and that being his present intention, and, further, clearing it with a hem or two, as he put on his gold spectacles,

—never in his life before had Sir Bradley—usually by no means a good listener—given his ear to anything he thought so deeply striking and affecting as that “Now, then, gentlemen, if you please,” with which Archibald accompanied the peculiarly tender look he cast on them, one by one, before he commenced reading.

It is curious to see, how sometimes, when time presses, these testamentary matters, involving, too, the disposition of enormous wealth, may be simplified and made equally secure on a foolscap sheet of paper or two, as if half a dozen parchment-skins were wasted on them. How many different dispositions of her enormous riches Betty Westminster had executed, and then cancelled, in her life, Archibald Sharpe knew best. It had been a sort of hobby with her to alter her Will. He never saw her enter his office, but he took for granted somebody was to be the richer or the poorer for it; and he never bowed her out, but he felt pretty sure of another visit shortly to undo all she had done, with no other reason assigned for it, than that “she had changed her mind.”

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The next  
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Archibald Sharpe  
would be well up  
on the time. In  
the course of  
our meeting we  
had some  
pleasant and  
interesting

In the room were  
Sir Baden-Powell,  
Mr. John Dawson,  
and Mr. Jessie Hill.

Archibald Woodford  
were sitting in a group  
room talking of a hole  
existing in themselves  
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such parlour.

Mr. Archibald Sharpe had  
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ver or two, as he put on his

ly perceive, was Miss Wentworth had insisted on her own words, being used. In some respects sorry for it, more pained than ress; but he had no option. of her strange peculiarities, all allowances. Poor dear exhibited at times striking a worse heart a good man had lost a dear friend be difficult to explain?" or of approval, in which Player cordially joined, Christopher thinking it dropped his eyes paper again " Only it to him at first us again--by dear'

do, of my lawful property now possessed; give and bequeath, &c., &c., &c. :—

“ To my faithful and trustworthy clerk and collector, John Dorking—the Winchfield Farm-Lands and Homestead, in the parish of Winchfield, in this county; also the Little Thornden Tithes, in the parishes of Thornden and Reddington; and the clear sum of Fifty Thousand Pounds, consols. And may Providence multiply greatly these my gifts, and ever prosper the work of his honest right-hand.

“ To Letitia Gordon, spinster, now residing with me, and with whose conduct since the first hour she entered my doors I am well pleased—All my wardrobe and jewellery, except such particular articles of either of them as my beloved sister Lucretia may desire to keep for herself; my Watch and Key and Seal that I always wear; my Silver Tea-pot, and Sugar-basin, and Cream-jug; my two cows, Colly and Molly; the Bantams I hatched with her by the fire in the hot flannel, and brought up with my own hands; and the clear sum of Twenty-Five Thousand Pounds, four per cents.

"To Christopher Griggs, surgeon and apothecary, of Hillborough—The House and Premises in which he now resides ; and Ten Thousand Pounds, four per cents ;—which is just double what he would have got, if he had pushed in his physic when it wasn't wanted.

"To Josiah Till, mercer and linen-draper of Hillborough—The House and Premises then in his occupation ; and the clear sum of Five Thousand Pounds, consols ;—in consideration that for now thirty-two years and more, he has never, to my knowledge, under-measured, nor over-charged me in one instance.

[N.B. Josiah had invariably taken care rather to over-measure a good half-yard for Betty, than under it.]

"To" and here Sir Bradley drew a long breath, as Archibald Sharpe took off his spectacles for a moment to polish the glasses with his silk pocket-handkerchief. — "To—to—let's see, where was I ?—Ah, yes—To Luke Gibson, grocer and tea dealer, of Hillborough ;—in consideration that, though weighing everything after him, Bibbs never found him a grain under the mark—the

clear sum of Three Hundred Pounds, four per cents.

[N.B.—Luke and Josiah were sworn friends, and agreed in everything.]

To Heather Bibba, my old and faithful domestic, still in my service, after more than forty years unremitting devotion to her duties,—Two Suits complete of good, plain, useful mourning; also the clear sum of One Hundred Pounds, sterling, down, over and above a full year's wages; also an Annuity of Fifty-Two Guineas, clear, to be charged on my funded property, as afterwards to be more fully specified, and paid quarterly for the term of her natural life; also my Mahogany Desk, and Japanned-tin Dressing-case; also the Furniture of her bed-room, as it stands at my death; and the six Windsor Chairs, and double-flap Dining-Table in the kitchen; also my every-day set of Tea-things and Tea-board; also the old copper Coal-scuttle, and Warming-pan; also the Best Wash-Tub and Stand; also all the Flat-Irons; and the Copper Tea-Kettle I call my own. And I do give her all these for her comfort, if so be she decide

to keep house for herself ; but if not, and she elect to live with her Niece, then that she may furnish her own room tidily ; and, managing well, want for nothing ; and have something to bury her decently, too, when her time comes. And I wish the Lord would put it into the hearts of all servants, to serve their employers as honestly and faithfully as she, Hannah Bibbs, has served me ; then there would not be so many once well to-do masters and mistresses in straits as there now are."

There was a simultaneous murmur of applause from all present, during which Mr. Sharpe took breath.

" To Margaret, or Peggy Skinner, as we call her, my other domestic,—Two Suits complete of good, plain, useful mourning ; also the clear sum of Twenty Pounds, sterling, down, over and above a full year's wages ; also the little round mahogany Work-Table in her bed-room, and the Bedstead and Bedding she lies on ; also the old Wash-tub and Stand in the laundry, and the Two Large Rincing-Tubs, and all the clothes-Lines and clothes-Pegs and clothes-Baskets. And I should have made the

Twenty Pounds Thirty ; but that she never looked after the fires well, but let them go out, and had to light them a-fresh, which cost more fuel—and this I do for a lesson to her.

“ To Miss Dora Fawn, second daughter of Major General Fawn, of “ Rosebank,” the clear sum of One Hundred Pounds, with which to buy herself a New Lace-Scarf. And if Miss Dora is not above taking a word of advice from a “ miserly old wretch,” who, if she had not saved a penny when she could, might not have had the pounds to leave—Josiah has two now on hand, to sell a bargain—beauties, he says—the pair for £7. 10s.—which would leave her £92. 10s. over and above, to set herself up in towels, and table-cloths, and shoes, and stockings, and such like, when she got married—things which young ladies, who wear real Mechlin at her age, never, that she had seen or heard of, had ever near enough stock of, for all their pin-money.

“ To Lieutenant Harold Gawkington, of His Majesty’s —— th., the clear sum of One Hundred Pounds, wherewith to replace the Gold Watch, smashed by my monkey Cripple,

at the Lowdon Ball that night :— with this little bit of advice also from the “miserly old wretch,” viz., to put a plain, useful, double-cased silver watch, like her own, in his fob for the future, which he can get one of, and a good one he would warrant for a twelvemonth, at Walter Bright’s, up street, for £4. 15s., cash ; and so have £95. 5s., clear, over and above, to go towards his tailor’s bills, which, she had always understood, young epaulettes in the army had more fuss and worry to get clear of than any others almost.”

“ To—to—no now—really you must excuse me,” paused Archibald, colouring, and throwing up his spectacles, and letting his eyes fall beseechingly on Warren in particular. “ The next has reference, I see, to the munificent sum of no less than Twenty Thousand Pounds, given and bequeathed, in consideration of his poor services at one time or another, it is pleased to state, to—to”— and Archibald, before proceeding further, marked the place with his pencil.

“ Bravo !” cried Griggs, for the moment utterly forgetting himself ; and which, adding to the poor legatee’s embarrassment,

fairly brought him to such a dead lock, that for several moments Sir Bradley was compelled to keep vehemently sucking the ivory knob of his walking-cane, to curb the fit of laughing that came over him.

“ In common courtesy, to say nothing of heartfelt gratitude, too overpowering almost for expression,” resumed Archibald, as soon as he could trust himself, “ I suppose, with two youngsters at college to make Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of by-and-bye ; and, let me see, three marriageable unmarried girls to portion off with all convenient speed, as befits their father—I may—you kindly incline to the opinion”—looking full at Griggs—“ that I ought to, accept it ? Very well, then, I yield :”—and, returning to the pencil-mark, the blood flushed again his temples, as, coming to the next sentence, something seemed to stick in his throat which fairly gagged him.—“ No—really I must be excused—this is too much,”—and laying the papers on his knee, Archibald looked piteously at Sir Bradley, unable to proceed further.

“ What is it ? ” asked the Baronet, faintly,

still with the knob-end of his cane between his lips.

"What matters," put in Griggs, "how it's worded? You are not answerable for that?"

"Certainly not," with one voice.

"Out with it," cried Sir Bradley, throwing himself back in his chair, and glancing at Josiah Till, who had his eyes on him, as if he could have strangled him.

"You have but to read what is put down for you in this instance, we take it," coughed Griggs.

"My poor aunt had such peculiar fancies, all her own?" observed Warren.

"Anyhow, she seems to have paid handsomely for their indulgence?" smiled John.

"Very true," echoed Mr. Plover.

"No need to say another word about it that I see," conceived Josiah.

"Out with it," repeated Sir Bradley, evidently of Josiah's opinion.

"Well, if I must, I must." resumed Mr. Sharpe; "though—hem—though the difficulties I have had at one time or another—hem—to—"

"Yes, yes—of that we are persuaded, fully persuaded," assented Mr. Plover. "Your profession has doubtless many trying as well as agreeable duties to perform. I am sure there will be but one unanimous opinion on this sad occasion, if I read right the feelings of us all assembled here to-day—feelings which——"

"Yes, yes—all right enough about them," agreed Griggs, looking at his watch. "Dear me, so late as that, is it? I must be off I'm afraid, or——"

"But ten minutes more," entreated Archibald, re-adjusting his spectacles;—"we shan't be longer. As you kindly say, I have but to read what is put down for me—duty—duty?"

"Out with it."

"That's best—and take it for what it's worth, and no more. Well, then—let's see—ah—where—true—yes—here, so it was."

'To—hem—'to my dear, devoted friend'—hem—'Sir Bradley Bellshaw, of Lowdon Hall, Bart,—what'—hem, hem—'what he would have given me any money for, if I would have sold him, but I wouldn't; thinking of the pleasure I should have in leaving him to him some day—viz. my monkey,

Cripple by name, or ‘The Commodore,’ as he called him ; not doubting but he will be a good, kind, master to him ; though he must not give him too much cocoa nut, mind, to eat, to make him saucy. Also, to wipe off old scores between them, the clear sum of Two Hundred Pounds sterling, with which to buy himself two new wigs.”

“Anything more ?” smiled Sir Bradley, flushing scarlet ; while Warren, biting his lip for shame, almost wished the floor would give way with him and hide his blushes.

“Go on,” demanded the Baronet. “Something—some little memento, surely, for my Lady ?” and, as he said it, he encountered Josiah Till’s two little hungry ferret eyes fixed on him with a look that made the ex-Mayor’s ears tingle again to catch what was coming.

“No, I really must be excused—I cannot—I will not,” exclaimed Archibald, laying the deed on the table.—“Might I have had my own way, as I told Mr. Bates, I would have entreated Sir Bradley, not to—not to—”

“Oh ! so bad as that is it ?” laughed Sir Bradley, grimly ; and rising and looking over his shoulder, as Mr. Sharpe, catching

up the paper, pointed with his pencil to the passage in question:—"If you won't, I must," said he; "so here goes—no use mincing any more words about it."

"To my no less dear, and devoted friend, Lady Caroline, Bellshaw, of do:—the clear sum of One Hundred Pounds, sterling, for nice cakes and confectionery, and delicious jams and jellies,—which were a great saving of fresh butter all the winter, when it was fifteen pence a-pound, and then half of it that came to market, as Bibbs knows, hardly worth eating. Also all the Lowdon empty pots and jars, which may come in useful some day, and save buying new ones."

"Exceedingly obliged, both of us, I am sure;" acknowledged the Baronet, with a hollow laugh that made Till shudder; and snatching up his hat, and bowing to Warren, he stalked haughtily out of the room—slammed the street door after him—had just sight enough to see that all eyes were on him as he went along—somehow got safe home, graciously smiling on every one he passed—had a short confidential conference with Lady Bellshaw—then a mouthful by

way of luncheon, while his valet was putting his things together—and in less than an hour afterwards was rattling along as fast as four horses could take him on his way to his Town Hotel.

A dead silence of half a minute held them all tongue-tied in the little parlour after the loud slam of the street door.

At length finding his voice, Mr. Plover “never remembered to have ever felt, so to speak, more hurt in his life.”

Nor Warren.

Nor John Dorking.

Griggs “would not trust himself to say what he thought;” but, casting another wistful look at the time, made it evident that he had something else to do than sitting there kicking his heels any longer;” while Josiah Till, fidgeting more and more on his chair, now Sir Bradley was gone, kept his eyes travelling from the door to the window, then from the window to the door, in a manner satisfied Mr. Sharpe he must be quick with the rest, if the nice stuffed calf’s heart that Josiah had his thoughts on “was to be worth a button when he got it, and the gravy all drying out of it in the oven as fast as could be.”

"I have now a much more pleasing duty to perform, I am glad to say," proceeded Archibald, bringing the paper before his glasses—"one, the kind purpose of which, I think, though far from what I myself consider meets the merits of the case, our excellent and highly esteemed friend and pastor here present will rejoice to carry out and give effect to as much as any of us."

The Rev'd Blandon Plover brightened up.

"I sincerely wish I could have prevailed on our dear, departed sister," continued Archibald, "to have done more—done as much as I must say, I think she might—as I think she ought to have done:—but herein, as in all else, you know how very peculiar, and how very positive she was?"

"Yes, yes—Christopher could answer for that. Catch her ever doing more or less than she meant to do."

"Miss Westminster certainly took strong and extraordinary views of things occasionally. In the present instance it was to be regretted she had not been spared to re-consider, a subject, which of all others—"

"That was not for any but One to judge the necessity of," interrupted Mr. Plover.

"He, for himself, was sure—if it was a charitable bequest that Mr. Sharpe was then alluding to, whatever its amount might be, little or much, they should be most grateful, and do the best they could with it."

"Still, had it been left to himself" insisted Archibald.

"It wasn't"—Griggs "knew it."

"Well then—and, pray remember, the words are her own:—'To the Rev'd Blandon Plover, Vicar of Hillborough Old Church, the clear sum of Fve Thousand Pounds, sterling—In Trust, first, for the erection of a suitable Stove, if it can be accomplished, in the South-Aisle of the said Old Church, to keep it from giving people their deaths of cold in winter; and 2nd,—for the building and furnishing with desks and forms, a New Infant School-room, with enough light and air in it, to see and breathe by; and that anybody six-feet tall may stand upright in easily, without taking his hat off; and, 3rd, with what money there is left out of it—for the help of the Poor of the Parish, in any way the Vicar may think best to use it. Also, to Florence Plover, his wife, the clear sum of Fifty Pounds, sterling,

for her delicious Xmas mince-meats—the best I ever tasted ;—and, mind, all the empty patty-pans to go back, which will come in handy.”

While this had been reading, the Vicar’s eyes had never left his thick soled-shoes and warm brown lambs-wool socks.—*In Trust*—all—every shilling of it *In Trust*? No, by the bye—fifty pounds for Florence—and the Vicar’s thoughts wandered, settled towards the ceiling.—“ Yes, a very—very kind donation!—most kind indeed !” and, now able to meet Josiah’s searching glances :—“ But we are anxious”—turning to Archibald—to know—”

“ Yes, yes—about the great bulk. Let’s see—yes—over a million yet—so there is—to give away ;” and, clearing his voice, Archibald Sharpe proceeded to give the good folks of Hillborough something to talk of that evening over their cup of tea.

“ Mr. Griggs, your kind attention just for five minutes longer, if you please. We are sadly intruding I am afraid, Mr. Till, on the nice little hot joint at 1 to day ? Now then—”

“ Subject to the various legacies herein already mentioned,” read Mr. Sharpe, or

same effect,—"I, Elizabeth  
Westminster, of Hillborough, as  
said county aforesaid,  
in other Wills and Codicils,  
and in instruments whatever, made  
at any time, do hereby  
name my beloved sister,  
presently residing at  
Llanybyr, in Herefordshire,  
part of my real and personal  
estate, whatsoever description, or where-  
ever situated, of which I may be legally  
possessed at my death;—to be, the entire of  
it, absolutely all her own, and at her own  
sole will and control. And may the Almighty  
Giver of all things increase and bless it in  
her hands to His worship and glory."

Mr. Plover looked up with a bewildered  
stare at Warren.

Griggs at John, with his mouth wide open.  
Josiah at his hat, with a confused feeling  
made him dizzy almost.

Archibald for the red tape he had lost.  
John Dorking fixedly at Warren?  
Warren read John's thoughts; and,  
grasping his hand, with eyes brimful and  
voice almost inarticulate, drew him closer to

him ; and whispering :—“ shan’t I be a great man now, all of my own making, too ? —John could have caught him, big as he was, and hugged him to his heart, he felt he loved him so ?

“ True,” said Archibald, “ Miss Westminster has left the whole of her immense wealth, subject to the several bequests I have read to you this morning, to her sister, Mrs. Lucretia Woodford. And, moreover, by a short note, taken from her lips but a few hours before her death, as this paper will certify, appointed her Sole Executrix and Residuary Legatice. But here is a memorandum ”—and Archibald produced a slip of paper as he spoke—“ here is a memorandum that I also took down at the same time, word for word as she dictated it, which will be deeply interesting, I think, to Mr. Woodford. If you please, I will read it.”—

“ Say to my dear nephew Warren, when I am gone, that I give all to his mother now. That is just—that is the law of my house—parent before child. He is a good son, and is safe in his mother’s hands. And, when it is his, I charge him, as he loves me, by the part blood of my race in his veins, I charge

him—to take, and, ever after, use the name of Westminster ; and, so, as he uses it well, may God prosper him with it."

" I may have and keep, that document, may I not ?" asked Warren with his throat full.

" Undoubtedly ? It is yours alone ; who's else ought it to be ?" and, tumbling his papers into his bag :—" Now then, good day to you, gentlemen," said Archibald, cheerfully, and shaking a hand all round. " I heartily congratulate you and all on your good fortune, and wish you much happiness with it ;" and, whispering Till on the door step— " If it's over done a little, and Mrs. T's looking down her nose, you won't break your heart about it quite, till you've let me make your will, eh ? you lucky dog !—ran off to his own hot chop and glass of pale dry sherry.

Pulling John after him into a room by themselves, Warren and he had it all over together after their own fashion. Then rejoining his mother and Letty in the drawing room, a little scene of heart-overflowings ensued, which only wanted Peter Borrington and Aunt Barbara present, to have been quite complete. As it was, it was delicious

in the extreme ! So much so, that at last John went to such lengths with Letty, that Griggs, who had sneaked in on pretence of wanting his hat, which he had in his hand, became so scandalized ! that he rushed headlong from the room ; and running from house to house—who in all Hillborough, and for twenty miles around it, was such a consequential personage that day as Lucretia Woodford ?

## CHAPTER XVIII.

WARREN STICKS TO THE ‘APRON,’ AND MRS.  
HARLOWE’S HIGHEST AMBITION IS GRATIFIED.

LUCRETIA took her good fortune as might have been expected from her character and disposition, very meekly. Nay, to use her own words,—and there was no cant in her any more, sceptical reader, than there was in Warren Woodford, or Peter Borrington, or, may be, yourself, though God-fearing and God-adoring persons,—“She received the good gifts granted her, at first, with a sense rather of fear and trembling, than either of joy or exultation. What, if they ever tempted her to forget herself, and for Whose service and glory alone they were entrusted to her ?”

It was a thought full of anything but self-homage ; but it abounded with comfort

—“for it threw her,” she said, “more than ever into the hands of her God, for counsel and assistance; and, so, she was encouraged, with increased strength and faith and reassurance, to the undertaking of the great Trust committed to her; and, setting about her work, with Peter’s generous aid, felt, indeed, all of a sudden a personage of no small consequence: — “Though, for her part,” dear Aunt Barbara, “if she might be permitted to express her opinion, was inclined to think, she carried it a deal too humbly—a vast deal more so than she would—to let anyone dictate to her in everything as Peter was doing. He got so high and mighty now, dealing with the thousands, there was no bearing him! A blessing when the filthy lucre was all done with; and they could hear something again of poor old Grace Thorpe and Nanny Shotter—matters that became him, she must take leave to say, rather more than what he now seemed to have his head full of from morning to night, Heaven help them!”

“And now, pray?” asked Peter, as soon as—affairs having been put somewhat in the right train for settlement under Archibald

Sharpe's judicious agency—they were reassembled at dear old Rexbury,—“pray, may I ask, Mr. Warren, what sort of a great man you are going to be?”

Aunt Barbara clapped her hands. “It was just what she had been wanting to know for days past herself; but, really, some folks were getting so grand! it was *noti me tangere* now with a vengeance—keep your distance.”

“Law, Aunt, dear!” and returning presently, after leaving the room for a minute or two, with a pocket-miniature of Sir Hiron King, Warren, merely answering “that sort,”—placed it before Peter.

Peter's eyes glistened as he took up the portrait and went with it closer to the light.—“What, ever be the like of this,” he cried; “ever be a man of that mould—with a ready-made fortune, fit for a prince to fly to—and never so much as ever put your nose in a public-school? What can you possibly be thinking of?”

“Of having a try for it, nevertheless, pardon the vanity,” smiled Warren.

Peter turned from the miniature to Lucretia. “Do you hear?—Muff of a fellow like that—his mother's own boy—brought up,

and taught at home from his cradle to manhood—never so much as put his nose in a public-school—turned out by a private tutor,—he ever think of making a Sir Hiron King?

“Bravo!” cheered Aunt Barbara.

“Why not?” asked his mother.

“Never so much as put foot, I tell you, in a public-school.”

“But never told a lie, did he?” fired Lucretia;—“never shirked a duty, or a danger?—went bathing with you all the winter, when you had to break the ice, it froze so?—for all the nice warm flannels in his drawers, never would put one on, wilful boy, to this day?—thrashed the gipsy, didn’t he?—raced Ben Brimble’s pony, that won the saddle and bridle three times, and beat him?—beat Ralph Champion, too, at the targets hollow?—and Reginald Colville four games out of five at football and single-wicket?—never, with all his strength, took an ungenerous advantage?—was always first to forget and forgive?—loved his God much better than gold?—never caused his mother sorrow?—worked, Sir Hiron tells us himself, till his hands were not fit to be seen in

company?—and is now—what he is—excuse a mother's blindness, if she be wrong—is—don't you think so—a very good looking fellow altogether—not unlike, by any means, his tutor."

"An exceptional case entirely," cried Aunty, apprehending a scene, "a perfectly isolated case, that don't affect the general principle a jot."

"What principle?" enquired Peter.

"I have not six boys to put to school, Mr. Borrington, as you know; but if I had—"

"You would pack them all off to Rugby and Winchester?"

"That would I most assuredly!"

"Why?"

"Because I would—that is sufficient, is it not?"

"Yes quite—as you have them not."

"Highty—tighty! And, pray, what would you do?"

"All depends."

"On the sort of boys, I suppose? Now, shall I tell you my mind. Had you taken my advice, and sent that 'mother's muff,'

there, as you call him, to Winchester, or Rugby, or even to Eaton?"

"What then?"

"Then—with a million in his pocket, or as good; and the blood of the Woodford's in his veins, Mr. Borrington—he would have worn an 'apron' for the remainder of his days, would he?"

"I fear not. A most Providential escape!"

"My love"—turning to Lucretia—"you perfectly understand what I mean?" appealed Aunty.

"Perfectly."

"You see, dearest, turn out as it may, it's what I say, a—totally exceptional, an altogether isolated case?"

Peter giggled. "How proud we ought to be!"

"Rubbish! Who wants to detract from your merits? Been a good, dutiful, pains-taking boy, of course he has. No thanks to his Aunt, I suppose? Done his tutor credit? A shame if he hadn't. No fault much to find about that—granted. But is there nothing due—due to his bloodhis.

name—his lineage? Do you know from whom he is descended, Mr. Borrington?"

Warren, sliding up, "would have a kiss for that."

"We shall see," chirped Aunty. "There's some of the right mettle in him yet."

"Genuine as imported!" hailed Peter.

"We shall see. Wait a bit till he's master. He'll spend the money, when it comes; like his forefathers, I've a notion—and I shan't blame him."

"Spend it—how?" asked his mother, artlessly.

"How? Not in buying him any more 'aprons,' love, I hope."

"There's a job, then!" cried Warren; "whip me if I havn't just ordered a new set!"

"What?" screamed Aunty, throwing up her arms aghast—"that to my face—and I have yet my will to make?"

"Now, own it," coaxed Peter, "you may just as well—wouldn't you like amazingly to see him Sir Warren, some day?"

"Not the smallest objection."

"Don't you remember what you used sometimes to say to me, Aunt dear, in the

little ‘workshop’ out yonder, when you were in your kindest, sweetest tempers, which was most always?”

“ What, wise so seldom as that, was I ?”

“ Don’t you recollect ?”

“ Bravo ! bravo !” cheered Peter.

“ Not quite so loud, if you please, Mr. Borrington.”

“ I am sure you remember,” continued Warren, stealing another kiss.

“ Some nonsense, I daresay, to please your mother—very likely, about your being the architect of your own fortune some day —well, and what then ?”

“ Then”—with another little whisper in her private ear—“ no oracle could have spoken truer.”

“ Bravo ! bravo ! bravo !”

“ S’deth !—the fortune’s made already, isn’t it ?”

“ Not a shilling of it.”

“ A million and more, you noodle, safe as the bank !”

“ Pardon me, not a groat yet.”

“ Oh, my poor brain !”—rushing out of the room distracted ;—“ go, go, then, and make haste about it—cruel, cruel !—to be

bringing your poor mother to the workhouse this way!"

Warren threw his arms round his mother's neck; while Peter sat grinning for joy, as Aunty, flouncing back to her chair, plumped down in it defiantly, and, crossing her arms over her bosom, and turning up her eyes to the ceiling, tried to look as much like a martyr as was possible—with the knowledge that her turn was coming next to a certainty, and no escape.

It came—and heroically Aunt Barbara bore it:—Peter continuing to cheer the while in a manner, "was to her, she begged leave to tell him, a far better evidence of the strength of his lungs than his understanding."

But, though staunch and true to the last—"no dirty aprons for her;"—the compact was sealed—the deed was done—he, Warren Woodford, of his own free will, was to be the architect of his own fair fortune.—"Provided always, nevertheless, that when she, Barbara Woodford—"

"Spinster," put in Peter.

"More's the shame a great deal," laughed Lucretia. "Fi, Mr. Borrington!"

"When she, Barbara Woodford—thank you, Mr. Borrington—when she, Barbara Woodford, spinster—thank you—came ever, whether by invitation, or without, to see him, single, or married,—he, Warren Woodford, her nephew, was to doff his 'apron,' and drop the shop ; and otherwise conduct and comport himself to her during her stay, however long she might choose to make it, in as gentlemanly a way as possible."

\*       \*       \*       \*

And so, the years rolled away, and merrily rolled, too, in the main, with Warren Woodford. They were the shortest and the happiest of his life, for they were the fullest employed, and crowned with the sweetest rewards. His way had its shadows, or of what hue would have been its lights? The up-hill made the down more easy ; and the down put the neck again to the collar, and the shoulder to the wheel, with a fresh spirit, sped him on his journey at a rate, no course, level and even though it had been as a grass-plot, could have sent him.

Peter Borrington knew his man. He had not misjudged him. What his strength was  
  *ad to*—his heart and soul once in it—that

he would accomplish, if mortal head and hands could do it. He had set himself to perform a task—a task, with him, of love as well as duty, and he would achieve it, if within the scope and power of human zeal and industry.

He did achieve it, manfully achieve it! So manfully, that—here to bring my story to an end—long before Peter's hair was quite white, or Aunt Barbara's much more than beginning to turn—without a shilling from his mother,—by the pith and purpose alone that were in him—the right stuff, and that only, he was made of:—the goal gained—Mrs. Harlowe “had no wish left,” she said, “on earth ungratified,” that extatic morning, when, before even the Court Journals could announce it to the world, Peter—Peter Borrington himself—calm as a judge, though bursting with joy, brought her the triumphant news—that, past all doubt, the thing was a *fait accompli*—her own fairest, dearest, sweetest Alice was at that moment Lady Woodford.

“That's what I call doing business “something like,” cried Peter, throwing up

his hat into the air, and then catching it again, like a great school-boy.

"He'll be doffing the 'apron' now, I'm thinking," said Aunt Barbara, half inclined to pick a quarrel with Peter, and half to kiss him.

"Doff the apron?" exclaimed Lucretia, changing from pale to red and red, to pale, as if there were something downright sinful in the idea; — "let me catch him doing it."

"How then, dearest?"

"I would cut him off with a shilling."

"Faith!" said Peter, "if that's all the power you have over him, I wouldn't give a button for it."

"Didn't I tell you," chuckled Aunty, "there was some of the Woodford mettle in him?"

And now, patient and indulgent reader, may be, before we part, you would like to know something about two or three other principal actors in this little domestic drama—where they went, and what became of them?

A few words will suffice for it all.

The Bellshaws, weary of England, went on the Continent, for pure French and

German for Miss Caroline and Miss Amy and Miss Isabel. They talked them beautifully in a very short time, quite as well almost as the natives themselves. But they forgot their mother tongue, which Lady Bellshaw did not fully perceive till she brought them back again after five years, when good dear old Aunt Harriet died, and left them the Thirty Thousand. Could Sir Bradley have pleased himself, he would have lived abroad all his life. It suited him. He got his claret for eighteen-pence a bottle—there was a saving, and the best Cognac for three and sixpence ; and could play all day long at billiards ; and smoke meerschums—and nobody ever dream of his being idle.

Christopher Griggs sold his business to his rival, Chowler Braggs; took his diploma, and a house at Brighton ; put *Dr.* in large brass capitals on his door ; and, though he's not as great a man there as he was at Hillborough, says “he is much happier”—notwithstanding Mrs. G. shakes her head at it;—still, he ought to know best ; and, as he looks the picture of health, though with a head now as white as a mop, perhaps it may be all for the best as it is. There

his hat into the air, and again, like a great sch—alt-weed ; and, “ He'll be doffin' aggs is no longer thinking, said Av— which is a comfort. to pick a quarre' knows too well, by kiss him.

“ Doff th—nnering the moss. His father changing ness, and so will he. He is still as if th—ind and limb, he says ; and, if “ his ful in ‘<sup>my</sup>” would leave him alone, has not

“ <sup>it</sup> to complain of, as times go. When <sup>himself</sup> ever to be a little dull and down, <sup>himself</sup> looks round him, and, comparing his actual with his possible state, calls for *Blackwood*, or *The Athenæum*, and a glass of weak Hollands and water ; and in five minutes “ would not change place with the King upon his throne.”

The Rev'd Blandon Plover is getting into years, too. They rather improve him than otherwise. His silver locks become his long, pale, hollow face. He walks a little bent ; but his voice is still strong and sonorous. His eye sight failing him rather, he has taken to extemporaneous preaching, though Florence was much against it at first; for, as he seldom ever seemed quite clear in his answers to general questions, and

very absent at times, his first essays newhat painful to listen to. He tter now, or, it may be, she is customed to him ; but it is a great , they say, when the old pulpit is filled y any one, who, though he looks on his book continually, is in no fear of breaking down ; and consequently, nervous people can sit and listen without suffering.

Josiah Till was very wrath for a time, when Sir Bradley went to Italy, about his little account. The furred velvet cloak nettled him exceedingly ! He got every sixpence, however, at last ; and there is now nothing too good he can say of him.

A fearful end befel Lucy Gwinnett, and a just retribution it was. It seems, that her mother's, Polly Quarle's, back shop, which faced the river, was so damp, the goods all got rusty and mildewed that were stowed away there. Polly would have a fire lighted in it one day, about twelve months after Betty Westminster's death. Polly was a rigid economist—paper was an object,—and, suddenly recollecting there was a heap of old Tracts which Warren had at one time or other given her and her mother, Lucy

ran over to her lodgings to fetch them ; brought them back in her apron ; and laying them under the wood, Polly's back room fire was soon alight and blazing away up the chimney. The chimney was foul. Moreover, a large bundle of dry hay and straw had been stuffed up it after it was last used, to keep out the wind, some three or four years past. But Polly had no fear, and went to drink tea with neighbour Bland. The chimney caught fire ; the house was built in great part of wood; the flames got ahead; there was no water, it was all frozen ; —and before morning nearly the entire of Cow Lane was a heap of ruins.

At the first cry of fire, Lucy ran like a mad thing to her lodging, for there she had left her child asleep in her bed. The house, was in flames when she reached it. frantic, she tried to ascend the stairs ; but she was pulled back by the bystanders, or she would have been choked. A ladder was put against the window. One after the other went up, and came down again baffled—“ the room was one sheet of fire—it would be certain death to enter it.”

“ Would it ? Then come death for both

of us, and welcome," cried Lucy ; and tearing up the ladder, with a harrowing shriek she burst through the casement into the chamber—and was never more seen alive.

Next day she was dug out of a mass of smouldering bricks and timber, with her boy in her arms, both literally burnt to a cinder.

They say, she never held up her head after Gideon's death. She was always wishing she was dead. Her mother lived in constant dread, that she would, in a mad moment, murder her child, and then destroy herself. And the first grief over, Polly "almost felt thankful they had met their end, dreadful as it was, as they had."

For herself, Polly Quarles had put by enough in The Old Bank to stock another shop, if she had been so minded. But Polly's heart had nothing now further to hold it in Hillborough—"for they would not spare her even Jacob." Jacob, found guilty of appropriating to himself more than was his own, Archibald Sharpe thought it a duty he owed to society, to ship him off for other lands—where Jacob is at this hour, if he's living, making gold by handfuls.

To pass to happier themes—John Dorking

and Letty are man and wife, and a happy couple they are as ever richly deserved to win the ‘fitch of bacon.’ John has a fat slice in the Hillborough Brewery; and is immensely proud of the bright-brass W. & D’s, now on the saddles and winkers of the fat Flander Browns and Bays, meeting you at every turn almost all over the country.

And Letty, they say, is quite a pattern of a wife and mother—only she spoils John more than she ought. But she declares “she cannot help it, try as she will—he is so kind and good to her! that, the truth is, she don’t know yet how much she loves him.”

When they go to see Griggs, at Brighton, Christopher’s first question always is:—  
“ Well, John, how many now?”

“ Ceased counting them, Christopher.”

“ Happy the man who has his quiver full.”

“ As it says nothing, does it, about the size?” laughs John; “ with your leave, I think I’ll keep to the medium, please.”

Sir Warren and Lady Woodford live in London, excepting when they contrive to find time to run away to Rexbury, which is pretty often. To see Warren work, anyone would fancy he hadn’t a shilling. But my

Lady keeps her carriage and pair, and a very stylish turn-out it is ! and, so, Mrs. Harlowe, now getting more elegant and indolent than ever, says nothing about it, as she knows it would be of no use ; but, enjoying her drives in Hyde Park excessively, is very thankful to Providence ! and decidedly looks upon her son-in-law as one of the wonders of the world !

Till the Colvilles left it, and “ The Bury ” became vacant, Aunt Barbara and Lucretia continued to reside at “ The Briers ;” indeed, could she have had her own way, Lucretia would have been content to end her days there. But wiser heads prevailed ; and purchasing of the late Marquis of Hardencore’s executors the entire property, just as it stood—there she and dear Aunty took up their abode together ; and are there now living a life, by all accounts, if Peter’s testimony may be taken, “ which may fairly entitle them to the sure hope, with all their wealth, of a better far hereafter.”

THE END.

